THE·BLUE·BIRDS·OF HAPPY·TIMES·NEST

LILLIAN·ELIZABETH·ROY

The Building of the Nest.

THE BLUE BIRDS OF HAPPY TIMES NEST

BY

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THE BLUE BIRDS

CHAPTER I

PLANNING HAPPY TIMES NEST

"Ruth, mother is under the old elm-tree on the side lawn telling Dot Starr about the Blue Bird Nest. I just passed by, so mother asked me to find you and tell you to come over," said Ned Talmage, as he ran up the steps of the piazza where his sister sat reading a fairy-tale.

"Dot Starr! But, isn't she too young to be a Blue Bird?" exclaimed Ruth, with a grown-up air gained from ten years of life.

"Too young! Why, Dot's as big as you, even if she is two years younger; besides, she can do almost anything her brothers do, and that's more than I can say for you."

"Why, Ned! What's the matter with you to-day? You are so cross; and you hardly ever talk like that to me," said Ruth, looking at her brother in an offended manner.

"Do you really want to know what it is? Then, I'll tell you," returned Ned, in a half-apologetic tone. "It's not your fault that that Blue Bird company in the city will only let girls belong, but it makes a fellow cross when he had planned to be a member, and then finds out he can't. Here am I—too young to join the scouts, and now, just because I'm a boy, they won't let me be a Blue Bird!"

Ned scowled angrily as he spoke, and Ruth replied, "Oh, Ned, I'm so sorry! When did you hear all this news?"

"Oh, mother got the book she sent for, and the rules on the first page say so. There was no use in my staying any longer, so I came away," and Ned's face showed his disappointment, for Ruth and he had made many fine plans for their Blue Birds' Nest.

"Ned, I shouldn't wonder but what mother will need your help and be glad to have you advise her in many ways, so you'll be just as important to the Nest, even if you're not called a Blue Bird," said Ruth, comfortingly, as she patted her brother's hand.

But Ned would not be consoled so easily. He shrugged his shoulders at Ruth's touch, and went

toward the barn, whistling as loudly as he could. Ruth, knowing her brother as she did, smiled as she watched him; then she ran across the lawn toward the big elm.

As she reached a knoll near the tree, from which could be seen the road that ran by Mossy Glen, the Talmage home, Ruth spied May Ennis and Edith Wilson hurrying along toward the gate. She called and beckoned to them, and soon the three little schoolmates were skipping happily over the smooth lawn toward the meeting-place under the shady elm.

"Good morning, children," Mrs. Talmage called cheerily, as the trio gasped for breath after their race. "Where is Norma—and Frances? Did you see them about joining the Nest?"

"Yes, Mrs. Talmage, and what do you think?" cried May, anxiously. "Mr. Wells says he's afraid this new idea about having a Blue Bird Nest is just another way we girls will take to play all through vacation, instead of doing sensible things. You see, Norma's father likes his girls to learn to help others."

"And Frances asked me to ask you to be sure and come over to her house to-night so her father can hear all about the Nest," added Edith.

"Yes, for her mother wants them to join if only Mr. Wells will say they may," concluded May.

"Of course I shall see Mr. Wells," said Mrs. Talmage, "and explain just what we hope to do this summer. I know he is very anxious to have his children grow up to be sensible, helpful men and women, and so are *your* mothers and fathers. I will let him know that it is for that very reason that I am starting a Nest here."

Dot Starr had listened intently to all that had been said.

"Mrs. Talmage," she said eagerly, "may I ask a friend of mine to join? She wants to be a Blue Bird, and her parents said she could."

"Do we know the little girl, Dot?" asked Mrs. Talmage.

"I think so—she lives at the cross-roads in that cute little bungalow; her name's Betty Stevens," replied Dot.

"Oh, yes; tell her we shall be glad to have her join us. The more birds in the Nest, the merrier. But we wouldn't want any to join after we have started to grow feathers. You know, that is another name for working for honors," explained Mrs. Talmage.

"Let's see, then," said Ruth, counting upon her fingers, "Betty will make seven of us."

"Unless you have some more little friends who wish to join now, suppose we build our Nest with seven nestlings and myself as mother-bird," smiled Mrs. Talmage.

"It's too bad boys can't be Blue Birds, isn't it?" asked Ruth, who felt very sorry about her brother's disappointment.

"Oh, can't they? Who said so?" asked the other children.

"Mother read it in the book, didn't you, mother?" said Ruth, as Mrs. Talmage picked up the Blue Bird Handbook from the grass where it had fallen.

"I'll read some of the advice given here, if you wish to listen," suggested Mrs. Talmage, waiting for the children to settle themselves comfortably.

" 'A Nest of Blue Birds is composed of girls under twelve years of age. This group is called a "Nest" with any individual name prefixing it. Blue Birds sing, help, grow, and do anything to make life happier. At first the birdies in a Nest are called "Nestlings"; later they become "Fledglings"; and when enough honors are won, they

are called "Fliers." Nestlings' costumes are of downy gray with feathers of blue, grayish white, and cinnamon red. The grayish white feathers grow after the birds begin to understand what it means to sing, help and grow.

"'A Fledgling's costume has added to the other dress, a blue cap. A Flier receives blue wings. All feathers grown by a Blue Bird must be earned: that is, by doing some good thing; for every good deed, a feather is the reward. When ten feathers of each color have been earned, the Nestling Blue Bird may wear the cap of a Fledgling. When ten more feathers of each color have been awarded, the Blue Bird becomes a Flier.'"

"What can we do to be a Flier?" asked Edith Wilson.

"How long would it take before I can have wings?" cried impulsive Dot Starr.

Everyone laughed, for Dot was the last one expected to grow wings.

"I will have to tell you what to do before wings will be awarded," said Mrs. Talmage. "In this book are many suggestions and general rules, but the Guardian of a Nest outlines the work and play for the Blue Birds, and really has charge of them. Every Blue Bird should have a

doll and take care of it. Then there should be garden work, sewing, home-craft, playing, singing, and many other ways of growing. The Blue Birds meet at least once a week, and oftener if they wish. Once a month they hold the Blue Birds' Council, at which meeting blue feathers, caps and wings are awarded. The Guardian takes account of the Blue Birds' measurements, weight, and health. As time goes by, this record shows the improvement and growth of the Blue Birds.

"Now we, having plenty of time during vacation, might meet every day for a short time, and once a week for our Nest meeting. Once every fortnight, we could invite our friends who are interested, and the boys who had hoped to belong. We will try to entertain them so well at that time, that they will be glad to come again."

"Yes, that will be fine!" exclaimed Ruth. "I'm sure Ned will come, but the other boys will want to have ice-cream and cake. They never go to any party we give, unless they are sure of refreshments, you know."

"I know plenty of little girls who like the refreshments better than the party," laughed Mrs.

Talmage. "But the cake and ice-cream need not be an obstacle to our guests coming to the party; every little bird can find a crumb for a feast, and should crumbs be scarce, we shall have to bake some."

At the promise of future feasts, the children's eyes were noticeably brighter, while their faces expressed approval.

"I guess Ned will be more contented when he hears of our twice a month parties," whispered Ruth to Dot Starr.

"Well, dearies—I suppose I ought to say 'Birdies' after this—now that we have decided to start our Nest with seven members, shall we adjourn until to-morrow when Norma and Frances will be present to help us choose a name?" asked Mrs. Talmage.

The children looked disappointed, and Dot said, "Why can't we name it to-day? Norma and Frances won't care."

The other children seemed to approve Dot's suggestion, so Mrs. Talmage smiled her consent.

Ruth saw her brother throwing pebbles at an ornamental fountain on the lawn, and feeling sorry for his loneliness, said to her mother,

"Why can't Ned come over and listen to us choose a name? Is there anything in the book that says a boy must not be about?"

"I think that will be all right, and maybe Ned can help us," replied Mrs. Talmage, as Ruth beckoned to him to join them.

Ned seemed most pleased to be present at the christening of the Nest, and sat beside his mother while she continued her explanations.

"Now every Blue Bird must close her eyes and think just as hard as she can for five minutes. Ned will hold my watch and tell us when the time is up. I will then call upon you in turn to tell what name you have thought of."

Silence reigned after that for several minutes, until Dot sighed wearily, and showed by her expression that a name had been thought of. May and Edith still pondered seriously, while Ruth seemed to be wholly undecided.

"Time's up!" cried Ned.

"Now, Ned," said his mother, "take this pencil and pad and write down the names as we call them out, then we will vote," advised Mrs. Talmage, looking inquiringly at the girls.

"I choose 'Straw Nest'!" exclaimed impatient Dot.

Mrs. Talmage smiled and looked at May, who said, "I thought of 'Feather Nest.' "

Edith came next, and replied, "I say 'Bluey Nest.' "

"And Ruth—what have you to say?" asked her mother.

"I thought I had a good name, but after hearing the other girls', it doesn't seem half as nice as theirs," answered Ruth.

"Well, let us hear it and judge for ourselves," returned her mother.

"I thought, that as we are expected to be happy all the time, you know, that the name 'Happy Times Nest' would fit it all right."

"Great!" exclaimed Ned.

"Fine" and "Splendid" came from the others, so that a vote was unnecessary—all being agreed that Ruth's name was the best.

"There, you see, even this work is taken from me," laughed Ned, as he held the paper out for his mother to take.

"But there is other work, more important," quickly replied his mother, placing a detaining hand on his arm. "When we adjourn this meeting, I want you to cut out little pasteboard disks about the size of a half dollar—or a bit larger.

You will find India ink in my desk, and this you can use for printing. Put 'Happy Times Nest' right across the center of each disk. Around the upper edge of the circle, print, 'Blue Bird Organization'; along the lower edge of the circle print the full name of the owner. Make a disk for each Blue Bird and we will give them out to-morrow morning, so each can wear her badge."

Mrs. Talmage knew Ned's pleasure in printing anything, so she gave him the task to make him feel that he had some part and interest in the organization.

A bright idea came to him, however, and he immediately asked, "Why not give each Blue Bird a bird name?"

"Oh, yes, that will be lots of fun," declared the children, and as Mrs. Talmage thought it rather a nice idea, all were requested to think again, this time for their own names.

Foreheads were puckered while heads were bowed in deep thought, until Ned called "Time's up!"

"Now, Ned, you'll have to write fast, to get all these unusual names down, for we will have to refer to this list more than once, I'm afraid,

before we remember 'Who's Who,'" laughed Mrs. Talmage.

"You ought to be called 'Mother Wings,' for you seem to know just what to do for us," said Ruth, admiring her mother's management.

"So you found a name for me before you attended to your own needs, eh?" replied Mrs. Talmage, smiling fondly at her little girl.

"Say, mother, but that name just fits you, all right!" exclaimed Ned, looking to the girls for confirmation.

"It does, so write it down, Ned," cried Dot.

The others approving, Ned wrote down the Guardian's name as Mother Wings.

Before he had quite finished writing, Dot spoke again: "I've got a good name for myself —it's 'Blue Tip.'"

"I can see where that will soon be nicknamed to just Tip," teased Ned, as he wrote it down on the list.

"I think I shall choose 'Flutter,'" said May, shyly.

"And I'll take 'Hoppity,'" laughed Edith.

So these names were added to the list, but Ruth, as usual, waited for everyone to have their

pleasure before she remarked, "I don't suppose it would be fair to take two names, would it?"

"I can't see that there would be any objection," replied Ned.

"You may choose a yard of names, if you like," laughed her mother; "there's no rule to forbid it, you know."

"Well, the reason I asked is, that there are two names I like and I can't say to-day which I like best, so I thought I would have both until someone chose the better one for me."

"Tell us, and maybe we can help," said Ned.

"I liked 'Flutey' on account of the Blue Bird's song, and I liked 'Fluff' because a little Blue Bird is so soft and downy," explained Ruth.

"My, both of them *are* nice, aren't they?" said Dot.

"Keep them both, dear, until later," advised Mrs. Talmage, so Ned wrote them on the list opposite his sister's name.

"Ned can't write the disks for Norma or Frances or Betty, can he?" asked May, reminding the others of the absent members.

"No, he will have to make their disks and add their chosen names later," replied Mrs. Talmage.

"I should think Norma and Frances ought to choose 'Peep' and 'Pick' to warn others of their faults," giggled Edith.

"If we are going to live pleasantly in the same nest, we must help others find all the *good* qualities in our family, and then the disagreeable traits will perish for lack of time to think of them," rebuked Mrs. Talmage, very gently.

"There are so many lovely names for Norma and Frances, that they'll have no trouble finding some," added Ruth, kindly.

"And now it's twelve o'clock—hear the town-clock?" interrupted Ned, rising from the grass.

"Why, how short the morning was!" exclaimed May.

"Oh, is that all for to-day?" asked Dot.

"I suppose you might try to fly across the lawn, if you like, and then you will have to run home to be in time for lunch," said Mrs. Talmage, smiling at the reluctance with which the children obeyed the suggestion to adjourn the Blue Bird meeting for that day.

"You'll have to show us how to fly, because we don't see how we are going to, without wings," said May.

"Just this way," replied Mrs. Talmage, stand-

ing up on her toes and spreading her arms out full length, and fluttering them up and down in sweeping circles. "Now we'll fly over to the stone wall by my old-fashioned flower garden. Ready—here we go!"

At the same time, she started off, running upon her toes, toward the bright-hued flowers that could be seen growing at the foot of a wall that inclosed the kitchen garden.

The four Nestlings tried to flutter after their Mother Wings, but so full of giggles were they, that many times during the flight arms forgot to wave, and feet came down flat instead of on the tips of the toes.

Ned enjoyed the scene immensely and vowed to himself never again to forget his kodak, if funny things like that were going to occur at every meeting.

"At our next meeting," said Mrs. Talmage after the Blue Birds had rested a few moments, "we will start to build a Nest and have lunch there, so you can notify mother that you will not be home for lunch to-morrow. Now, we will disband, but remember, every Blue Bird must be under the elm very promptly in the morning, prepared to begin work. One of the principal les-

sons to learn is promptness in keeping appointments. I could tell you many stories of folks who have failed in life just through the bad habit of never being on time."

The children listened gravely and remembered the advice, as was proved in later times.

CHAPTER II

THE NEST IN THE CHERRY TREE

While Ruth accompanied her little friends to the gate that opened upon the highway, Mrs. Talmage hurried after Ned, who was sauntering toward the house, and soon caught up with him.

"Ned," she said, "I would like to ask your opinion about something. Do you think it would be possible to build a platform in the old cherry tree that leans over the stone wall near the garden?"

"A platform! What for?" asked Ned, surprised.

"I am sure the girls would like a nest built up in a tree, and I wondered if we could fit it in among those crooked and lopped off boughs. The tree is too old to bear fruit and Simon has been bothering me for permission to cut it down. If we can build the Blue Bird Nest up there we will have found some use for the old tree."

"Say, mother, you're the best ever!" exclaimed

Ned, admiringly, smiling at his mother in good comradeship.

"Thank you, dear, but I really have nothing to do except devote my time to my children. If father could be at home more, you might not find me quite so ready at all times to enter into your plans."

"Oh, yes, you would; you just can't help giving us all the good times possible; only, if Dad were home, he would join with us."

Mrs. Talmage sighed softly, thinking how happy they would be if her husband could be with them all of the time; but discontent never found lodging in her thoughts, and a sunny smile soon reappeared upon her face.

"I shall have to go in now and see that lunch is served, but you can run over to the barn and ask Simon to come to the house about two o'clock," said Mrs. Talmage, as they reached the piazza steps.

Old Simon came promptly at two, and the plan was laid before him. He grumbled and objected a great deal about giving the old cherry tree any cause for another lease of life.

"He's be'n cumberin' the place for y'ars, an'

no good outen him," said Simon. "All he's good fer now, is kindlin' wood fer the kitchen."

Albeit a spark of interest showed itself in the old man's twinkling eyes, at the idea of the Nest.

"Now, Simon, if I didn't know you so well, I would say you were hard-hearted, and only too glad of an opportunity to chop off the old tree's head. But I see right through all of your grumbles, and I know how pleased you are that some good excuse is found to keep the old tree your father planted. When we think of the fine times I had when a child, and that now my children enjoy the same fun in climbing up and about the gnarled branches of the tree, it seems a pity to remove it," declared the mistress, who understood the gardener's pride in the estate.

"Wall, I suppose the children will have it so," assented the old man, grudgingly. Then, with lively interest, continued: "How shall we build it?"

"We will go to the tool-house with you, and see if there are any boards that can be used. I should like a platform just as large as possible. Some of the short boards can be used to fit in among boughs, while the longer ones can be laid on top of the stumpy boughs which have been

long cut off. There ought to be enough of them to make a sort of a support underneath the frame."

"I'll make the framework to fit on the sawed off limbs first, then nail the planks atop of it; as you say, all short pieces of board can be used here and there between the limbs. We ought to be able to build a platform about ten or twelve feet square," said Simon.

So, that afternoon, mother, children, Simon and Ike, the hostler and chauffeur, were engaged in building the platform. The fact that many different kinds of wood were used for the Nest made no difference, as long as it was strong and firm. Before night, the work was completed, and the carpenters stood and looked up to admire their work.

The platform was about ten by twelve feet, and almost nine feet above the ground. The branches of the tree hid most of it from sight, but the corners showed where they extended beyond the boughs. In some places the edges were irregular, being extended to reach out to a convenient limb. On one side a triangle was formed between two stout boughs, so this was decided upon as the best place to build the ladder.

"I wish the steps were done, too, so we could use the Nest to-morrow," said Ruth, eagerly.

"Maybe Simon can fix a temporary stair until the others are ready," said Mrs. Talmage, looking at Simon for an answer.

"It's too dark to do any more here to-night, but Ike and I will saw out the runs and steps to-night after supper, so we can nail 'em up in the morning," returned Simon.

Ike stood by nodding assent and when Simon concluded, said, "It'll be looking like a steep climb, I'm thinking, Simon—we'd better have flat steps instead of rungs, and a hand-rail on both sides."

"And Simon," added Mrs. Talmage, "I think we would feel relieved to know there was no possible danger of one of the children falling off the platform. Maybe you could fix a rail about that, too."

Simon and Ike understood just how to make the nest safe, and lifted their caps when their mistress said good-night.

Early the next morning Ruth and Ned heard the noise of hammers and saws at work in the old cherry tree. Both hurried down-stairs and ran out to watch the building of the stairs. The

actual run and steps had been made in the tool house, and now the men were raising them up to the platform, and nailing down the braces and cross-pieces.

"Oh, look, Fluff!" exclaimed Ned, who had called Ruth by her bird-name since the meeting when the birds christened themselves, "the safety rail is on the platform."

Ruth had been watching Simon drive a post down into the ground under the stairs, but when Ned called she ran over to the stone wall upon which her brother had perched himself, and looking through the leafy screen of the tree, saw that the rail was securely fastened.

"Oh, that's what we heard you hammering, isn't it?" said Ruth, as Simon came over to see how they liked it.

"Sure! And just as soon as Ike gets that board nailed to the post, you can climb up the steps and see how you like it."

In a few moments Ike called that the brace was secure, and the two children jumped down from the wall and ran over to the steps.

"Now, don't be jumping up and down the steps like as if they was quake-proof," admonished Simon.

The children skipped up the ladder quickly, and they inspected every bit of the platform to their satisfaction.

The side rails were nailed to the steps, and all the work was completed before ten o'clock—the time appointed for the second meeting.

Ruth had been waiting under the elm some little time before the girls appeared, but Mrs. Talmage and Ned were still busy at the house with some secrets connected with the Nest.

Soon, Dot Starr could be seen skipping up the road, with Betty Stevens eagerly talking to her. Then, Edith and May could be seen, coming from the opposite way, with Norma and Frances Wells joyously hopping beside them. Mrs. Talmage had telephoned Mr. Wells the night previous, and his little daughters were telling Edith and May how Ruth's mother explained what the Blue Bird Association was for: its purpose being helpful, instructive, and moral, and not merely for play, which might waste precious moments.

Just as the clock in the church tower pointed to ten, Mrs. Talmage and Ned came across the lawn and welcomed the children. Ned carried a pasteboard box and Mrs. Talmage the books.

The children formed a half-circle about Mrs.

Talmage, and she explained to Betty and the Wells girls about the work and play of Blue Birds. After they heard the names the girls had chosen for themselves the day before, Betty said, "I don't see what name I can think of; you girls seem to have found all of them."

"Oh, no," cried Ned, "there's heaps of others, Betty. "Why, you could choose Blackeye, or Silverbeak, or lots more."

"Betty, you are always so happy, why not choose the name Song—that will suit you," added Ruth.

"I will! I will! I'm glad you thought of it, Ruth," exclaimed Betty, relieved.

"And what can we find?" asked Norma, disconsolately.

"We shall have to put our bills together and find names for you," laughed Mrs. Talmage.

Before long, however, Norma and Frances were christened Bill and Coo, and their names placed in the roll-call book.

While Mrs. Talmage was occupied in calling the roll, Ned printed the names of the three children on the disks where space had been left for them, and then each girl was given a badge corresponding to her selected bird name. They

were pinned to the dress by means of a tiny safety pin hidden under a cute little bow of blue ribbon.

This done, they sat looking to Mrs. Talmage for her next suggestion.

She smiled and said, "To-day, we will give our time to the building of our nest. We will be so busy finding and carrying material, there will be no time to go home to lunch; so, I telephoned to your homes to say the Blue Birds would have to seek and find their bread crumbs out-of-doors this noon."

Ruth and Ned understood their mother so well, that they laughed gleefully, and Ned winked at the other girls, as much as to say, "Just you wait and see what our mother has planned!"

Rising from the grass, Mrs. Talmage said, "Come, birdies, we must work while the sun shines. The nest must be ready for us to live in to-day, and straw must be found. I wonder if the wind could have blown any under the branches of that large pine tree. Let us go and see."

The children soon fell in with the idea, and started off on a race toward the tree which stood some distance away. Dot reached it first, and

plunged under the sweeping boughs, to shout out victoriously, "I've got a big bundle." She tried to carry it, but it was too heavy; then she dragged it part of the way, until Ned ran over to assist her.

The bundle was laid upon the grass and the twine which bound the covering paper soon cut. Dot was so excited over tearing the paper off, that she fumbled it, finally pulling at the end, until a huge roll of Japanese grass matting slipped out.

The other children crowded about filled with curiosity, wondering what it could be for. Mrs. Talmage laughed, and told Ned to carry one end of the roll while Dot carried the other, until they found a suitable spot for a nest.

The children then began to suspect some plan for their amusement, and covertly watched Mrs. Talmage, for some new development. She saw the glances and said, laughingly, "I'm not sure whether ordinary bluebirds have furniture in their nests, but I *do* know that my Blue Birds will want chairs to sit upon, and perhaps a table or desk."

"Oh, yes, Mrs. Talmage, we would like some,"

cried Dot, clapping her hands, thereby dropping the matting.

"But you have found your 'straw' to carry to the nest and the others have not, so you will not have to hunt for more," replied Mrs. Talmage, advisingly.

As Dot and Ned were exempt from the "straw hunt" they watched the others running about, here and there, to find something they felt sure would be hidden for them.

Finally, a shout from Betty drew them all toward some tall palmetto grass behind which sat Betty resting in a low crex rocker. A general laugh greeted the sight, and Betty was told to join the birds with the matting, carrying her "straw" with her.

From the palmetto grass, Mrs. Talmage led the children away from the direction of the cherry tree, and took them around the garden, back of the house, past the side, and back to the cherry tree from the front. This she did to keep the Nest a surprise until the last Blue Bird had found her "straw."

Not far away from the palmetto grass Edith saw a flat paper-wrapped parcel leaning against the trunk of an overhanging umbrella tree. Had

she not been stooping to look under some bushes, she would have passed it by. Shouting aloud to the others, she crept under the branches, and dragged forth the heavy package. Almost at the same time, May spied a large bundle among some lilac bushes, and both "straws" were eagerly opened by the finders while the others watched with anticipation. Edith's straw proved to be a round flat table-top, while May's were the legs to fit it. As the table was made of wicker, moisture would not injure it.

Other chairs were soon found by anxious seekers, until everyone had a "straw" excepting Ruth. Ned half suspected his sister of some motive, and whispered to her, "Fluff, where are your eyes? You generally see things before anyone else?"

And Ruth whispered back, "I know, but we had so much fun last night and this morning, that the others missed, I thought I would let them all get their straws first—besides they're our company, you know."

"Well, it's your turn to get a straw now, and I helped Simon hide it, so I know you've got the best of all—maybe that's because you waited for the others to be helped first!" said Ned.

Ruth looked surprised but started to seek in earnest, finally seeing a square package wrapped in heavy paper, standing behind the Virginia creepers by the corner of the house. It was opened and found to be a bamboo cabinet, which combined desk, bookshelf and table all in one. When the lid of the desk was down, one saw a tiny drawer for pencils, ink, etc., while some pigeon-holes on each side would hold paper and envelopes.

"Oh, how cute!" exclaimed a chorus of voices, but Mrs. Talmage, thinking they could compare notes at the Nest, said, "All ready to fly with our straws, Blue Birds, for we still have to climb up in a tree and build our nest, you know."

"Not really—you're only joking now," ventured Dot, half in doubt.

"Are we going to carry these things to the piazza?" asked Norma, while the others waited for the reply.

"No, we are really and truly going to have a nest up in a tree," laughed Mrs. Talmage, while Ned and Ruth giggled gleefully.

"How can we?" said Betty, dubiously. "We'll fall out!"

"And all this furniture won't stick to the limbs

of a tree," added Norma, looking at the short legs of her chair.

While they argued, Mrs. Talmage led them along the path that ran by the stone wall. Suddenly, turning a clump of laurel, the children in front saw the corner of the platform showing among the boughs of the old cherry tree.

"Oh, goody, goody!" screamed Dot, hopping about.

"Oh, did you ever!" cried Norma and Frances together.

"Wh—h—y, Mrs. Talmage!" gasped Betty, while Edith and May dropped their "straws" and started to climb the steps.

"This is our future Nest and meeting place when the day is fine," explained Mrs. Talmage, to the great joy of the Blue Birds. "Shall we try to flutter to the top?"

It needed no second invitation to go up the steps, and the straws were left on the grass until later.

As the platform was too high up for the children to lift the furniture, and the steps too narrow and steep to permit it being carried up, Ned was sent for Simon and Ike to come and help. Simon and Ike had been hiding behind the wall,

watching the surprise of the children, and when they heard their names mentioned, they climbed over very quickly.

"I suppose the matting is for the floor, but there's too much of it," said Dot.

"You won't say so when you see what it is all for," replied Mrs. Talmage; then turning to Simon, asked, "Did you remember the hammers and tacks?"

Simon had, and showed his mistress where he had left the things she needed. The children were provided with hammers and some matting tacks, and then the explanation followed.

"After this rail was completed this morning, I saw how easy it might be for a Blue Bird to slip under it and fall down. When I began wondering what I could do to make it safe, I remembered some matting I had in the house. As it was straw matting which would not be affected by dew or rain, I had Simon bring it out. It was Ned's idea to hide the furniture, so we worked hard to get it all ready before meeting time. Now, I will show you just how to fasten the matting down, and that will be our first lesson according to the Blue Bird Book."

Mrs. Talmage showed the children the best

way to tack matting and how to make two edges meet, holding them securely down with the double-pointed tacks. The children were permitted to do all the hammering, under Mrs. Talmage's direction. Many an "Ouch!" and "Umph!" made Simon and Ike turn away their heads to hide a laugh from the Blue Bird who had hit a fingernail instead of the tack. After much work, however, the sides of the Nest were all enclosed, and enough matting was left to cover the pine floor of the Nest. Mrs. Talmage and Ned went down on the grass, to give the children more room to work in. Just as Ruth leaned over the rail to tell her mother the matting was all laid, the clock in the church tower struck one.

"It can't be one o'clock!" exclaimed the children.

"But it is; you see time flies when one is busy with pleasant work," replied Mrs. Talmage, going up the steps to see whether the work had been well done.

The Blue Birds watched her as she inspected their Nest, and when she smiled, saying, "We will be very cozy here, won't we?" they all agreed with her.

It took Simon and Ike only a few minutes to line the nest with the "straws," and then they withdrew, greatly pleased to think that they had helped build the attractive home for the Blue Birds.

"Well, Blue Birds, we have not stopped to look for crumbs this morning, and most birds attend to that early in the morning, I believe," said Mrs. Talmage.

The children stood about waiting expectantly for her next words, for they knew she was about to tell them something interesting.

"I never knew of any free bird that found its lunch all ready cooked and served—they always have to seek for their morsels. Now that our Nest is built and ready, we must see about crumbs. We all found the straw when we sought, so we surely can find the crumbs if we look carefully."

"Are Simon and Ike hiding them now, among the shrubs?" asked Dot, eagerly.

Mrs. Talmage laughed before she answered, "No, I never heard of nuts or bird food growing under pine trees or laurel. Birds generally find plenty of pickings in the woods."

Ruth caught her mother's idea, and started

down the steps calling, "Come on, girls, we will run to the woods and look."

Mrs. Talmage followed the excited children down the steps and, being joined by Ned, who had waited for her, walked after the children.

The woods which gave the Talmage home its name, began near where the wall ended, so the children hurried over and entered the shady woods. They darted everywhere, looking under bushes and behind trees, for packages or baskets of goodies.

Nothing was found, however, until Mrs. Talmage came over and said, "Maybe you are expecting too large a crumb. Now, I am sure I could find a crumb should I try."

The children urged her to hunt, and all followed close upon her heels, as she walked over to a sturdy plantain and in its center found a small square, wrapped in a paper napkin. Upon inspection, it proved to be a cold chicken sandwich.

"This looks like a good crumb; that's what I win for looking very carefully," said Mrs. Talmage.

The cue thus given, the children soon were shouting over their discoveries. One found a

piece of layer cake hidden in the heart of a wild cabbage. Another picked a sandwich from a blackberry vine, while still others found apples growing on oak trees, and oranges and bananas hanging from birches. The excitement continued until Dot called out, "Shall we eat our crumbs as we find 'em?"

"I think it will be more fun to carry them all to the flat rock by the spring, and hold our feast there," called back Mrs. Talmage.

At this advice, Ruth puckered her brow trying to think of a way to carry all the little "crumbs" she had found. "I know, I'll take a large plantain leaf and use it for a dish," she said.

This answered the need so well, that the other girls followed Ruth's example. After a time, there seemed to be nothing lacking for a fine picnic, but Mrs. Talmage hinted at some "crumb" still hidden, by saying, "I have seen woodpeckers cling to the bark of a tree and pick their lunch right off the bark."

The children started off at that, and soon Betty cried, "Oh, that woodpecker forgot this tree! See what I've found."

The others ran over in time to see Betty pick

a clump of luscious dates from the bark of a chestnut tree. They all laughed merrily, and hurried to seek further for other good things.

A chuckle of laughter from Ned called them to his side, where he stood looking at a rough-barked tree; in the crevices made by the furrows of the bark stuck different kinds of candies, some wrapped in shining gold or silver foil. It was the latter which drew Ned's attention to the tree, else he would have passed it by.

By the time the trees along the pathway had been robbed of their unusual fruit, the Blue Birds had almost reached the rock where they planned to feast. Every imaginable kind of goody had been found, but no one thought of glasses until some had seated themselves by the spring.

"Oh, I'm so thirsty!" said May.

"You'll have to lie down on the moss and sip the water from the spring," said Edith.

"I am not so sure of that," returned Mrs. Talmage. "I have not yet found my share of the crumbs to add to the feast, so I think I will seek about here while you all wait for my return."

The children watched eagerly, while Mrs. Talmage went from one tree to another, and

finally caught hold of an elderberry branch, bending it down so she could untie a heavy package hanging there. She brought her "crumb" over and took off the paper, disclosing an enamel pitcher and several mugs.

The children laughed at the last "crumb" found, and Mrs. Talmage explained why enamel had been chosen. "They will not break, and the rain won't hurt them. So we can leave them up in the Nest to use whenever we like."

The feast proceeded without interruption after that, until everyone had plenty, and Mrs. Talmage told the Blue Birds some of her plans for their pleasure during the summer.

CHAPTER III

NED IS CHRISTENED AN OWL

Having outlined some of the plans made for the Blue Birds, Mrs. Talmage added, "You see, birdies, we must *earn* our right to membership in the Blue Bird Organization. To win these honors, we must do all the work, help, or play, when the opportunity comes to us, not only at our meetings, but at home, in school, and everywhere. Sometimes, the hardest kind of work will be ours, when we have to keep our lips closed tight and think, 'I love you, I love you, I love you!' toward some neighbor who has not been kind to us. Such an attitude from you will do more to sow seeds of love than anything else."

The children were listening very intently to every word Mrs. Talmage said, but not wanting them to feel that she was preaching to them, she continued in another strain. "Some of our work may seem like wasted time, especially if there is a servant about the house to keep things tidy.

But, never mind, just go on picking up little things that are out of place; keep your room neat and tidy, run steps for mother, or others, and you will soon find you are of great help to everyone about you. Another thing connected with work is sometimes miscalled play. That is, sewing dolls' clothes, learning games in the right spirit—or in fact anything we can do to add to our health and education. Playing at work is the quickest way to learn it well. Now look at our work to-day! Would any of you think it was work? No, indeed! You call it a jolly good play. But to a certain degree, we have been working. It is too bad that the word 'work' has come to mean a disagreeable task, when it really should mean 'doing something.' On the other hand, play has come to mean 'pleasure' to such an extent that often folks think it means a waste of time. But Blue Birds are going to show the whole world just what the words work and play mean, and then others will see the true meaning."

Although Ned was not a member of the Nest, he had remained to feast with the Blue Birds, and as his mother concluded her little sermon, he got up and stretched his cramped muscles

saying, "Mother Wings, don't you suppose there will be plenty of work that I can do for the Blue Birds?"

"There is no doubt of it, Ned, and I am very glad you asked that question, for I thought of something I should like you to do for us in a few days."

"If I can be of use to the Blue Birds, then why can't I be some other kind of bird? I won't have to call myself a Blue Bird, you know, but some kind that won't give the organization any room to complain."

"How queer that you should ask mother that, Ned. I made up my mind to ask her the same thing as soon as we were alone to-night," said Ruth.

The children looked at Mrs. Talmage in silence while she thought over the proposition.

"I think," she said smilingly, "it's a splendid idea, and I cannot see how any objection could be raised against your being some other bird. To us Blue Birds you seem very wise, so why not be an Owl?"

"Oh, yes, Ned," exclaimed Ruth, eagerly. "Don't you remember that owls always sit with

a pen back of their ears? Some have 'specs' on their noses."

"The only owls I ever saw had beaks!" shouted Dot.

"Noses and beaks mean the same thing, anyway," replied Betty in defense of her dear friend Ruth.

"I guess you saw that owl sitting at the head of our weekly newspaper," laughed Ned. "The editor puts him there to make folks think there is much wisdom in the paper."

At Ned's sarcasm, Mrs. Talmage looked serious, but she had not even heard Ned's speech, for she was thinking of something suggested by Ruth.

Ned glanced over and saw her preoccupation, and waited for her to speak.

"I have been thinking that we ought to keep a record of all our doings, the records ought to be printed in order, as they come. But there will be other things to print besides records," said Mrs. Talmage.

Ned caught the idea immediately.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, "mother, wouldn't it be fine if I could print all those things on the hand press that Uncle Ben gave me for Christmas?"

"Just what I should say," replied his mother, smiling.

"But, say, girls!" cried Ned, as a better plan came to his mind; "why couldn't the Blue Birds have a regular weekly bulletin printed?"

"Wouldn't it be fine!" replied the children, looking at Mrs. Talmage, for approval.

"And mother, then I'll be a real Owl. I'll print the weekly paper for you, and there you can read about everything you did, and lots of things that are worth knowing. You see, I will have to be my own reporter, and that will keep me going about with the Blue Birds a great deal, so as to get all the news."

"Oh, Ned, Ned! I just felt in my bones that you'd find some way to be a bigger bird than any of us!" cried Ruth, running over and hugging her brother with all of her strength.

Mrs. Talmage laughed outright at Ned's bright idea.

"Ned, you've certainly solved your own problem," she said. "Not one Blue Bird officer can complain of your interfering in the work. Besides, I think Happy Times Nest will be proud to send a copy of their weekly newspaper to Headquarters."

"Maybe some of the grown-ups would buy a copy every week, so they can see just what we do," volunteered Norma.

"I think that is a good suggestion, too. But why ask them to pay for it?" asked Mrs. Talmage.

"Why, we can put the money away, and use it to help someone," returned Norma.

"A splendid idea, and one that does you credit, my dear," smiled Mrs. Talmage.

Before Mrs. Talmage had completed her sentence, however, Dot was most impatient to be heard.

"And let's go around and get some advertising for the paper!" she suggested with an air of triumph.

"We haven't found a name yet, and there are other things to do before we solicit advertising," laughed Mrs. Talmage.

"Oh, yes! Let's find a name for it right now," cried May.

"Can't we call it *'The Owl'?"* asked Edith.

"Or else *'The Blue Birds' Bulletin,'"* added Betty.

Ned noticed his sister's expression which generally denoted something clever, so he hushed

the others and said, "Fluff has thought of something, I know—let's hear it."

Ruth flushed prettily at her brother's name for her, and being encouraged by her mother's smile, said, "I think it would be real cute to name it *'The Weekly Chirp.'*"

"Just the thing!" "Fine!" were the exclamations of satisfaction that came from the children, while Ruth's mother said, "An excellent title, Fluff."

Ned, too, approved the name heartily, so he was elected the editor of *The Weekly Chirp,* whose editorial and circulation plans were too tremendous to mention.

Mrs. Talmage made a motion to start for home, and the children looked anything but pleased about it; but being told that it was almost five o'clock, they rose and shook their skirts free of moss and leaves. As they prepared to return through the quiet woods, Mrs. Talmage suggested a game of "hare and hound," and soon the girls were off, followed closely by Ned, who took the rôle of hound.

Mrs. Talmage walked along the path carrying the jug and cups until the cherry tree was reached. Here the hound chased the hares until

they fell exhausted upon the grass. Ned ran to take the things from his mother, and was told to leave them on the table in the Nest.

While he ran up the steps to do his mother's bidding, Dot exclaimed, "Oh, Mrs. Talmage, we've had the loveliest day! I wish we could have it all over again."

"But to-morrow is another day, Dot," laughed Mrs. Talmage.

"When I've had a good time," said Ruth, "I just try to look for something new and good coming on its way to me while I sleep. Sometimes I find rain pouring when I hoped for sunshine, but I remember heaps of things I want to do on a rainy day, so I am glad for the rain because it gives me time to attend to those things."

"That's why your face always shines as if you had glad news to tell someone," declared Norma.

"Oh, it's easy for Ruth and Ned to shine and be glad—just see their lovely home, and everything! Even Mrs. Talmage is always thinking of lovely times, while my mother has to do her mending," grumbled Betty.

"Hi, there! What's that?" called Ned.

"Why, Betty," said Ruth gently, "just stop

and think what you've got every day that we haven't."

Betty looked up surprised to hear that the family she envied lacked anything to make for happiness.

After a moment's pause, Ruth added, "Your dear father! He's better than everything else, and we only see our dear dad once in a great while, because he's away traveling so much."

A lull caused by the children thinking seriously over Ruth's words was broken by Frances sighing.

"I've had such fun," she said, "yet I feel as good as if I'd been to church."

"Yes, so do I! Why is it, Mrs. Talmage?" said Edith.

"Because you all forgot yourselves, and joined to make everyone else happy," replied Mrs. Talmage.

Just then the housekeeper came out and asked her mistress to come in and see about some matter, so Mrs. Talmage said good-night after reminding the Blue Birds to be at their Nest in the morning at ten.

"Well, Blue Birds, the Owl must go to his room to prepare some type for *The Weekly*

Chirp. Be sure to bring me every scrap of news you can find," said Ned, as he left the girls.

"I suppose we ought to hurry home, but Ruth, please tell us how Ned will ever print the paper," said Norma.

Ruth was always happy to tell about her brother's clever doings. "Why," she began, "Uncle Ben found out how much Ned liked to fuss about printing, and last Christmas he sent him a complete outfit: type, forms, tools, a hand-press, and everything. Mother got him the paper, and Ned always prints when he has anything to print. This plan of the weekly paper will make him forget his disappointment about not joining the Blue Birds."

"Of course it will be lots of fun to have a weekly paper, but we will know all the things we have done without having to have it printed," commented May.

"Oh, I think if Ned gets it started, he won't stop at our doings—he'll find lots of outside things to tell us," returned Ruth, in defense of her brother's plan.

"Well, I'm going to tell Mete and Jinks about Ned's paper," said Dorothy Starr, "and see if they don't want to do something real smart like

that. Don has often said he wished he was a man, so he could be a trolley conductor, or something big."

Dot's tone expressed the admiration she felt for Ned.

Then Ruth came nearer and whispered a secret: "Mother says that after a time, if we all do things as she hopes we will, she will think out a way we can make some money. The money will go to take a sick child out of the city into our lovely country town until it is happy and strong. If we can do that, won't it be grand to have Ned tell others about it in the *Chirp?* Maybe they will help, too."

The Blue Birds stood about in silence, Ruth's secret having made them all feel the tremendous importance of their undertaking.

"And I don't see why Ned can't sell the papers he makes just as well as the man who makes the *Record,*" said Norma.

"My big brother who goes away to school helps on a paper that they sell to everyone," ventured May. "They get lots of stores to advertise in the paper whenever anything goes on that will sell extra papers. The boys take the papers around to the houses and the folks are

glad to read about the special sales of the stores. Why can't Ned try that way, too?"

"I'll tell him as soon as I go in," promised Ruth.

"Nothing extra ever happens in this town," ventured May, dolorously, but she was hushed by the majority crying, "There will something happen now."

Mrs. Talmage reappeared at this moment. "I came back to say that I must go to town in the morning," she said, "but you may all assemble at two o'clock, for I will be home then. During the morning you might hunt up some pieces of silk, velvet, or other stuffs to sew upon. We can sit in our Nest in the cherry tree and hold a real sewing-bee."

The children readily consented to the plan, and started homeward, while Ruth ran in to tell her brother all about the school paper that made a success in advertising the shops to its customers.

CHAPTER IV

"THE WEEKLY CHIRP"

"Say, Fluff, mother is coming to my den after breakfast to see some of the stuff I've set up for *The Chirp*—will you come too?" asked Ned, one morning soon after the Blue Bird picnic.

"Will I! Why, I'm just crazy to read what you've written about the Blue Birds," cried Ruth, delightedly.

"I mentioned the paper to some of our tradesmen," said Mrs. Talmage, "and they seemed to think it would be a good idea to insert their business cards each week telling the housekeepers what special sale is on, or what delicacy can be had at the time."

"Will they pay Ned for the cards?" asked Ruth.

"I hardly think Ned ought to ask more than actual cost of paper and ink, until *The Chirp* has some circulation," responded her mother.

Ruth looked across the table with fond pride, as she expressed her thoughts to her brother.

"Maybe you'll be a big newspaper man some day; and you'll make it the best paper in the world, won't you?"

"Indeed I will!" declared Ned, positively.

The three rose to leave the table, Mrs. Talmage patting her son encouragingly on the shoulder. Ruth danced on ahead of them and opened the door to Ned's room. It looked like a real printing office with the neat little case of type, cans of ink, the miniature press, and galley proofs and scattered papers lending a general air of literary disorder.

"You mustn't sit down, or lean against anything, because you'll smudge your clothes with ink, you know," laughed Ned, half apologetically.

Mrs. Talmage stood looking about at the disorder with a smile on her face, while Ruth ran over to the window-seat where some loose sheets of printed paper, about 16x10 inches, were drying.

"May we hold one, Ned?" asked Ruth, eagerly.

"I'm afraid the ink is still wet, for I just did them this morning. Here's one I practiced on last night—this is dry," replied Ned, taking a sheet from the table and creasing it down the center, making a folded sheet of 8x10 inches.

Mrs. Talmage took the proffered sheet and going over to the window beside Ruth, they both read with great interest:

THE WEEKLY CHIRP

PUBLISHED FOR THE BLUE BIRDS' NEST

Proprietor—Ned Talmage. Editor—The Owl.

Society Notes

We hear that Professor Swallow, the renowned throat specialist, has opened an office in this town.

Sky Lark, Jr., has recently taken lessons in aero navigation and proposes giving a public exhibition of high flying next week.

Flutey Blue Bird has leased a studio near the woods where she hopes to form a class in singing.

Her brother, Top-knot Blue Bird, is an expert in giving relief to those who have the blues. The method used is most pleasant and permanent. Mr. Blue Bird's apparel might lead some to believe that he is subject to the malady, but he contends the Blues are a state of *feeling* and not of clothes or surroundings.

Current Topics

The Blue Birds of Happy Times Nest meet every day during the vacation, unless notified. Sunday excepted, of course.

The new quarters of the Blue Birds are greatly appreciated, and the structure will prove an addition to the architectural beauty of our city. Souvenir pictures of the Nest will soon be published.

At the last meeting of

Blue Birds a unanimous vote decided them to start immediate work for some benefit. The object of their work will be to use the proceeds to bring some delicate child from the city into the country.

With pleasure we hear that Miss Bobolink patented the first endless chain, so called after the name Bobo—endless; link—chain.

The Blue Birds Nest begs to say that any boy found robbing a bird's nest will be tarred and feathered until he resembles a bird during moulting season.

Our readers will learn with relief that Jack Hawk, notorious chicken thief, has been captured.

During the perusal of the paragraphs, both Mrs. Talmage and Ruth made flattering comments about the clever writings.

"Ned," said his mother when she had read the last line, "your subjects are most appropriate and well-pointed. I am very proud of your wit and humor shown here."

Ned flushed with conscious pleasure at his mother's words. "Oh, Ned," Ruth added, "I think they are too cute and funny for anything. It's a shame not to have others read them. I'm sure there are lots of our friends who will be glad to buy a paper just to see what the Blue Birds are doing every week."

"Oh, I don't know, Fluff," returned Ned, du-

biously. "You see there are only seven families really interested in your Nest, and mother is one of 'em. Six families will hear what goes on every day from the Blue Bird herself, so where would the paper interest them?"

Mrs. Talmage stood thinking for a time.

"I'm not so sure that what you say will prove to be the rule," she said after a while. "I know several ladies who would delight in helping along any good cause, and in a case like this, they would unquestionably lend personal, as well as financial support."

Mrs. Talmage had planned to go to the city that day, so she said, "I must be going now, but think over what I said. Fluff, you may have the automobile if you like, and take the other girls for a ride."

"Do you want to go with us?" said Ruth after her mother had gone.

"I guess not; you'll have six other girls besides yourself, and I'd rather fuss over my printing."

Ruth looked at him for a moment, debating whether to confide the purpose of her trip.

"I'm going about to visit some of our friends and see if they will subscribe to the *Chirp*," she said finally.

"Oh, are you? That's great, Fluff, but now that you tell me, I wouldn't go under any condition. An editor never thinks of going about to tease people to read his paper, you know."

Ruth saw the business point at once, and laughing, she ran out to ask Ike to bring the car around as soon as he could.

A half hour later Ruth jumped from the automobile and rang the bell of Dot Starr's home. Jenny, the maid, opened the door and smiled when she saw it was little Ruth Talmage.

"Miss Dot'll be glad to see you, because Master Donald went off on a tramp with the scouts, and she's mopin' about saying how she wished she was a boy, too."

"Where will I find her, Jenny?" asked Ruth.

"I'll call her back; she jus' went upstairs to hunt for pieces to make doll-clothes. Oh, I say! Miss Do—o—t—here's Ruth Talmage come to see you!"

"Oh, thank goodness!" was heard from above, and in another moment Dorothy Starr ran down the stairs.

Jenny went back to her parlor work, and Ruth explained the cause of her visit.

"I'll be glad to go with you—just wait until

I find my hat," cried Dot, when Ruth invited her to come with her.

At May's house, where Ike stopped, the two children saw their friend swinging in a lawn swing. She saw them, too, and ran over to greet them with, "Where are you two going?"

"Peddling papers—want to come?" laughed Dot.

"Peddling—my goodness! what for?" gasped May.

The other children laughed and Ruth replied, "I saw Ned's paper this morning, and it is just great! I am now going to visit some of mother's friends and see if they will subscribe to it."

"And any that Ruth don't know, I will, and I'll ask them to take our *Chirp,*" added Dot.

"And do you want me to go with you?" cried May, eagerly.

"If you can——" Ruth began, but May was off toward the house to ask permission of her mother. Running out on the piazza, she caught up a hat from the wide rail and soon joined her friends.

Ike was directed to stop next at Wells' house, but Norma and Frances had gone to the city with their mother, and would not be back until

The Machine Stopped for Betty.

noon. From here, Ruth told Ike to go to Edith's home.

Edith was only too happy to spend the morning hours in such a way as the girls described, and after climbing into the car, asked if they were going to take Betty.

"We're going there now; there is plenty of room, too," replied Ruth, as the machine sped along the country road and stopped for Betty, who had been swinging on the high gate that led to the garden.

Betty was squeezed in beside the other children, and Ike was ordered to go straight to Mrs. Catlin's.

"Mrs. Catlin's got heaps of money," Ruth explained, "and she's always ready to do something for others. You know where Top Notch is, don't you?"

The others had heard of Mrs. Catlin, and of course everyone in Oakdale knew where Top Notch was—the prettiest bungalow ever built!

Mrs. Catlin was at home and interested to know why the little girls had come to see her. As soon as Ruth began to tell the story of the Blue Birds, her companions assisted eagerly, until Mrs. Catlin nodded "yes, yes" without once

getting the thread of the story. Finally, however, Ruth reached a point where the others could not follow, as they had not seen the *Chirp,* and were not prepared to explain about the cards or subscriptions. So, from that time on, Mrs. Catlin began to understand what the visit was for.

Mrs. Catlin waited until the story was done, and then said, "Such a worthy object as helping a sick child away from the city to spend some weeks in the country, must be encouraged by all of us, so I will not only subscribe to Ned's paper, but I will be willing to donate money at any time you may need it."

Ruth gasped her thanks, while the other children sat forward on the edge of the chairs with eyes wide opened at the success of this, their first venture.

"Now, give me the book and let me write down my name and address, for a subscription," said Mrs. Catlin, going over to her desk and taking up a pen.

"Why! I never thought of paper or a book," gasped Ruth, in dismay, looking at the others to see if they had thought of any paper.

"Well, never mind; I have a number of memo-

randum books on hand, and we can use one of them," said Mrs. Catlin, as she opened a drawer and found a small red morocco book which was held shut with a pencil slipped through some loops at the edge.

"Oh, that's too lovely to give us!" exclaimed Ruth, as she saw the gold lettering on the front cover.

"Oh, Mrs. Catlin, is it one of those nice smelly books like pocket-books?" cried Dot, sniffing delightedly from where she sat close to the desk.

Mrs. Catlin laughed outright, and handed the book to Dot for answer.

"It is, girls! And Daddum told me the real kind smells just like this, and it comes all the way from Morocco. That's ever so far away on the other side of the world, you know."

The other children crowded about Dot to have their turn looking at and smelling of the little book, and Mrs. Catlin said, "Morocco leather comes from the country known by that name, in Africa. The skins come from goats which roam over the hill-sides. When the goats are skinned, the pieces are thrown into a wash of lime-water, and left there until the hair and hardness is all gone. Then, the pieces are sewn

into small bags which are stuffed with sumach. The bags are blown up with air and securely tied and left for a time, until the sumach has done its chemical work. The pieces of the bag are then ripped out again, and the leather is ready to be 'grained.' The natives do this by rolling a sharp grainer over the soft impressionable skin. It dries, retaining the furrows, and later is made up into costly book covers, purses, furniture coverings and other valuable things."

The girls listened intently to Mrs. Catlin's explanation of the Morocco book cover given them, and when she had finished, Ruth thanked her. Dot happened to glance at the little desk clock, however, and cried, "Oh, goodness! We've been here more than half an hour."

"And just think of all the places we have to go before noon," added Betty, in dismay.

"Maybe I can help you more than you could do if you ran about calling at places where half of the ladies would not be at home. Now, I will be at the Literary Club this evening, and there I will be able to tell several friends of this mission. They will surely subscribe if I think it is a worthy purpose, and they in turn will have friends who will be asked to take the *Chirp*. The

main thing is, to get a sum of money together to get that child out of the city."

Ruth nodded her head solemnly, as she said, "That's just it, Mrs. Catlin."

"And we ought to have the money soon, even if the *Chirp* doesn't get printed until another week," added Dot.

"Yes, I see! Well, then I believe my way is a good one, but that need not keep you from calling upon the others you have on your list."

"We're ever and ever so much obliged to you, Mrs. Catlin, and if you promise to tell your friends what you said, I will have more time to see some folks for advertisements, because lots of my names are members of the Literary Club that mother belongs to," said Ruth, with a deep sigh.

"That much is settled, then," said Mrs. Catlin, as she opened the red book and wrote her name at the top of the first page. "Shall I keep this until to-morrow? I will see that the ladies write their names and addresses on these pages."

"Oh, yes, please do!" replied Ruth, delightedly.

"What did you say just now about advertising?" asked the benefactress.

"Why, I was just thinking how much extra

time I would have if you saw the ladies, and I could go and ask our baker and grocer to put their cards in the *Chirp,*" said Ruth.

"Hum! I see. Now, that is another way I can help you somewhat." And Mrs. Catlin took some cards out of a tiny drawer inside the desk, and wrote a few lines across each. She gathered them in her hand, and held them out to Ruth.

"Now, this man, whose name is here, is my butcher. You tell him about the Nest, and what you intend doing with the fund you raise. I think he will insert his card in the *Chirp.* This man is the one who has that lovely market on the corner. Tell him your story, and give him my card. I am sure he will advertise. This woman's name is the one who owns the bake-shop where all the homemade cakes and dainties are made. She is very pleasant and kind, and is sure to help you in some way."

Mrs. Catlin explained about the other addresses which she had written on her cards, and after placing them in the side pocket of the morocco book, she patted Ruth on the back.

"I think we shall soon have that delicate child out here playing on the grass and finding rosy cheeks in the air, eh?"

Ruth smiled, while the others agreed emphatically with their hostess. They took their leave, thanking her over and over again for her help.

"Oh, by the way," she said, as the children were going down the veranda steps," shall I pay you now for the subscription, or would you rather send a bill?"

"Dear me, Mrs. Catlin, I forgot to ask Ned how much to charge for a year's *Chirp!*" exclaimed Ruth, dismayed.

Everybody laughed, but Mrs. Catlin added, "That will be all right whatever it is. But you must telephone me before to-night, so I will know just what to charge the ladies."

"Why, then you'll need this book, as you said; and I'll just take the cards in my hand," said Ruth, running back to give the subscription book to Mrs. Catlin.

"I'm so excited over it, that I am just as forgetful as you are, Ruth," laughed Mrs. Catlin, as she watched the children crowd into the car, and wave their hands to her.

Ike was asked to take them to the bake-shop first, and on the way there, Dot said, "It will be heaps of fun if we keep books and send out bills by mail."

"But I'm afraid we will get all mixed up, because we don't know how to do it," objected Ruth.

"Well, it's easy enough, I guess. You just tell them they owe the money, and put the bill in an envelope. A stamp has to be stuck in one corner above the address, and that's all there is to it."

"We'll ask mother about it, Dot, and if she thinks we had better send out bills, I'll let you do it," responded Ruth.

"All right, I'll do it in a minute!" said Dot, eagerly.

Meantime, May, Betty and Edith were talking about the kind offer Mrs. Catlin had made. Ruth heard the latter part of their remark and said, "Yes, and I think she is just lovely!"

"Mumzie says she's glad Mrs. Catlin belongs to Oakdale because she's a public ben—ben—oh, something or other that helps along everything that is good for the town," cried Dot.

"And to think of all the trouble she took to help us!" ventured May, who was still impressed with their success.

"I wish we *did* have that subscription money in our hands, because it looks like so much more

when you show it to Ned," said Betty, thoughtfully.

"We must be almost getting to the baker's, don't you think so?" asked Dot, who was anxious to secure an advertisement.

But Ruth was surprised to find that Ike had turned off from the main road and was slowing up the machine near his sister's farmhouse. She said nothing, however, thinking that maybe Ike wanted to tell his sister something important.

As the car stopped, two children, coming from the chicken coops back of the house, spied their Uncle Ike, and called to him. He smiled, but turned to say to Ruth, "I'll explain to you why I stopped here, if the children do not tell you before we go."

Ruth had often been at Ike's sister's, but the other girls had not, so they were very much interested in the ducks, the cattle, the cute little house and the lovely flower-beds. While Ike called, and waited for the children to come to him, Ruth told to her friends about the Mason family.

"That's Tommy and Tessie Mason," she said. "Ike is their uncle, because you see, their mother is his sister."

Tommy and Tessie grinned a welcome to Ruth, and looked up at Uncle Ike to ask what he wanted.

"Why, you see, the Blue Birds here have a weekly paper called the *Chirp*. Mr. Ned is a printin' of it, while the young ladies are sellin' it, and gettin' advertisements. You two youngsters sell fresh eggs at the stores, but I think you kin get better prices and sell more if you put a card in the *Chirp*. Now, what do ye say about it? The young ladies will tell you anything you want to know about it." Ike finished and waited to hear what his nephew and niece thought of the idea.

"That's all right, Uncle Ike, but how much will it cost us?" asked Tommy.

Ike laughed and said, "You're a real farmer, all right! You never say 'Aye' until you hear how much it costs. Well, the *Chirp* hain't got its rates out yet, but I'll see that you won't be bankrupt when the bill comes in."

"And are all those eggs yours?" asked Ruth, pointing to the large basket the children had carried from the coops.

"Half are ours and half belong to mother, but we sell them for her, and she gives us ten

cents for that," replied Tommy, who was a good little business man for his years—ten.

At this point Mrs. Mason came out on the porch and waved her hand to her brother, then to the girls in the car. "Won't you get out and have a glass of cold milk?" she asked cordially.

Betty and Dot were for saying yes, but Ruth reminded them that they must see the bake-shop woman, so Ike shook his head and thanked his sister for the children.

"Then, you fix up the ad. for us, will you, Uncle Ike?" asked Tommy, after he had consulted with Tessie a moment.

"All right, we'll see to it, and now good-bye. I'll come over some night and tell you all about this *Chirp,*" returned Ike, as he started the car.

The girls waved their hands to the children and their mother, and soon they were on the short cut to town. On the way, Ruth leaned over the back of Ike's seat and said, "Ike, why couldn't Tommy and Tess try to sell some spring chickens, too? I heard your sister tell mother last week that they had more than they could look after."

"Now, that's just what they can, Miss Ruth.

I'll go over to-night and tell them all about this business."

"And we'll get all the customers for them that we can," promised Dot, abetted by the others.

It was nearly noon before the children reached the bake-shop, but the woman took the card and, after reading it, smiled and wrote an advertisement on some paper. This she handed to Ruth and said, "I guess your printer will know how large a card is wanted. The bill can be collected any time."

Ruth thanked her, but wondered whether Ned *did* know about cards. But Dot was elated over the fact that a bill would now have to be made out, and Ruth had promised her that she could attend to that work.

"Ike, you'd better hurry us all home now, because mother said there would be a Blue Bird meeting this afternoon, and all of us have to get our lunches," said Ruth, in a worried tone.

The children seemed worried too, but Ike calmed their fears of being late at the Nest.

"I can run over in the machine and pick up the Blue Birds, Miss Ruth, after I get your ma from the station."

Ruth felt as relieved at this offer as were the

girls, and Ike soon left each one at her home, and took Ruth home.

Ned awaited his sister's coming with impatience, and as she ran up the veranda steps, called to her, "Ruth, come in here, I want to show you what I did on the *Chirp* since you went away."

"Oh, but, Ned! When you hear what *we* did for the *Chirp,* you'll hardly believe your senses," cried Ruth, with such exultation that Ned wanted to hear about it right away.

Then Ruth told him all about Mrs. Catlin's offer, the card for Tommy and Tess, and the card for the bake-shop woman. The signed paper from the baker was given Ned, and he was so amazed that he caught his sister about the waist and danced her out into the hall just as his mother came in from the city. She had to be told all about the news, and Ned forgot his own important news in telling of Ruth's.

CHAPTER V

THE BLUE BIRDS' BAZAAR

The members of the Blue Bird Nest soon found that not only was the *Chirp* a good medium through which to earn money for the sick child who was to come from the city, but it was also a quick channel through which to notify friends of anything important. So well did the Blue Birds canvass the town for subscriptions and advertisements, that Ned was kept busy a greater part of the time setting type and printing the *Chirp*. When this was done, he would address the papers so subscribers would get their copies without fail. At first, he used the automobile to go about distributing his papers, assisted, part of the time, by Ruth. But Ike suggested a great saving of time, which plan was adopted. Said Ike, "Instead of copyin' the names from yer list onto the papers, why not carry the list wid ye, and jus' hand out a paper to the door of each one who's on the list?"

Ned immediately saw the saving of almost an afternoon used in addressing, and thanked Ike for the suggestion. Then Ike added, "An' here's two of us—sometimes Miss Ruth, too—goin' about in the machine wid the papers. On days you have something else to do, I kin just as well carry the papers about in the car, as if you was with me. If the machine has to be used for other plans, we can carry the papers another time."

"Why, that's so, Ike. I never stopped to think that you wasted time while you sat in the auto waiting for me to run to the door with a paper and back again!"

So, it was arranged that on days when Ike had nothing better to do, he should deliver the papers for the Blue Birds.

The children had grown more interested in the Nest every day, thereby proving Mrs. Wilson's prophecy to be groundless, when she said, "Oh, the Blue Birds will soon tire of the Nest, and poor Mrs. Talmage will have had all her trouble for nothing!"

Mr. Wells—he had objected most emphatically to Norma and Frances joining because he said present-day children wasted all of their

time in play—watched proceedings with keen interest. He was an advocate of athletic sports, fresh air, and wholesome work or play, so Mrs. Talmage had explained that the purpose of the Blue Birds was to fill a need for children younger than the age of twelve. That was the age that Boy Scouts and Camp Fire Girls had to be before they could become authentic members of either organization.

The beneficial influence of the Blue Bird Nest over its members soon became noticeable, and Mr. Wells, with the other parents, felt most grateful to Mrs. Talmage for her zeal in the undertaking.

If the interest manifested by the children in their Nest continued through vacation, there would be little thought of going to the seashore or mountains, for not one of the members seemed willing to lose a moment of being with the Blue Birds when there was a meeting. And this very decision to remain at home during that summer was the means of a great help later in the season.

The third number of the *Chirp,* which was issued the third Saturday after the Nest was started, devoted the entire front page to an important announcement. It read:

"The Blue Birds' Nest hereby announces that a Bazaar and Entertainment will take place on the lawns of Mossy Glen, at two o'clock, Thursday afternoon. The proceeds will be used for the immediate relief of a city child who needs country air.

"PLEASE COME AND SPEND SOME MONEY AT THE BAZAAR."

The last clause was set up by Ruth after Ned had finished the typesetting. Ned was not aware that his work had been added to, as he had been called out of his den by Jinks and Meredith coming over from Oakwood. He soon returned, bringing his chums with him. They were immediately interested in the *Chirp* and wanted to see Ned run a copy off the press. The two visiting boys had been away at a Boy Scout Camp for a few weeks, so had heard nothing of the Nest and the newspaper. Ned hurriedly arranged the first form and started to print. A number of sheets had been handed to the visitors to read before Ned discovered Ruth's work at the foot of the notice.

Ned's eyes grew wide as he wondered how

those words ever got in type. Ruth stood by reading a paper with an expression of elation stealing over her face. Ned saw, and suspected.

"Say, Fluff, do you know how that line got in my notice?"

Ruth nodded her head affirmatively, while still reading.

"It's just spoiled my fine display in that notice! It sounds so cheap to ask folks to come and spend their money," objected Ned.

Jinks laughed outright, while Meredith said, "Oh, I don't know. The object of this bazaar is to raise money, so why do you feel so modest about telling folks so?"

Ned thought over what Meredith said, then turned to Ruth and said, "But how did you learn to set type? And why did you use all capitals?"

Ruth giggled mischievously as she replied, "Oh, I have watched you set so much, that it was quite easy to do as you did, but I only found that case of big letters, so I had to use them."

"Well, that notice of yours might keep some folks away," stubbornly declared Ned.

"If it did, you ought to be glad, because such people won't do any good to the bazaar," laughed Jinks.

And Ruth added, "We don't want anyone to think we are giving the bazaar for fun, but to get more money to hurry that poor dear out of the hot city."

Mrs. Talmage had fitted up a room for the Blue Birds to use in rainy weather, and here they sewed, painted, sang or played games if their Nest was too damp to use. From the making of pen-wipers, blotters, pin-cushions, and other little articles, grew the plan of holding a bazaar and selling the fancy things made. Then, the idea of entertaining was suggested by Mrs. Talmage, who thought it would be nice to go through a form of calisthenics such as the Blue Birds practised every day.

From the time the announcement of the bazaar appeared in the *Chirp,* the Blue Birds were so busy they scarcely had time to eat or sleep. There was still so much to do before Thursday. A great deal of crêpe paper remained to be made into all kinds of little articles which Mrs. Talmage knew about. Then there were the clothespin dolls which they had read about; clothespins with the wooden knobs at the top for the heads, faces being made with pen and ink, and little dresses sewed about the neck and tied with a

sash about the middle. Some of these dolls had lace bonnets, while others had some hemp pasted on for hair. Peanuts had been made into all kinds of things: dolls, birds, animals, and so on, until one forgot that they could be eaten, if the lace clothes or tiny feathers were removed.

The Wednesday morning before the day set for the grand affair, Mrs. Talmage met the Blue Birds in the Nest and said, "I think we will have to go to our room in the house, to-day, as we will have to pin little slips of paper on everything for sale, and write the price on each."

There still remained a few little things to be completed, but Mrs. Talmage said she would see that they were done. So all the Blue Birds started to price their handiwork.

Ned had cut out little tickets with a tiny hole punched in one corner, so the girls would have little trouble in running a loop through it and attaching it to the article. Upon the face of the ticket the price was plainly marked.

It proved to be quite a task to value everything in a just way, for some of the things looked very fine, but cost so little, while others that cost more did not look as well as some that cost nothing but time and patience to make. Finally, how-

ever, this tedious work was done, and Mrs. Talmage gave a mighty sigh of relief.

"I knew we should all be so busy to-day," she said, "that I sent word to your mothers that we would lunch here."

"Oh, how lovely!" cried some of the Blue Birds, while the others showed their pleasure by their smiles.

"We have never had a meal inside our Nest, so I had Ned help cook carry some crumbs there. I just heard the signal, so we had better go," explained Mrs. Talmage.

"I don't see how Annie ever climbed those steep steps to the Nest," ventured Dot, who knew how stout the cook was.

The others laughed, while Mrs. Talmage replied, "That is where Ned gave most of his assistance."

Just then a shrill song, which sounded something like a canary, was heard again, as it had been a few minutes previous. This time, it continued for a long time, and the Blue Birds realized that it must be Ned giving the signal for lunch. As they started for the door, it was opened from the outside and Ned poked his head in to say, "If that song doesn't bring the Blue

Birds quickly, the bugs and ants will spoil the feast—ants love jam or honey."

It needed no second warning, and immediately every Blue Bird was running downstairs and out toward the Nest. At the Nest they found lunch served on the wicker table, and the chairs drawn about it in a circle.

Ned acted as waiter, saying, "I must mention this lunch under 'Society News' in the *Chirp,* so I have to be 'One of those present,' you know."

"But a newspaper man never turns himself into a waiter," teased Ruth.

"Sometimes he has to masquerade as anything, to get his news," retorted Ned, who had heard stories about reporters on well-known papers.

Ned proved to be a very alert waiter, filling glasses with water before he was asked, and passing the sandwiches the moment he saw the last bit disappear.

Mrs. Talmage followed Ned's actions with a smile, and said, "I shall never worry again, if we are left suddenly without a maid, and company is expected."

"But I must be a butler then," Ned retorted, "and a good butler never works himself—he makes all the others work."

Everyone laughed at the idea of Ned being a butler, and so, with joking and laughing, the lunch was concluded.

As the party walked slowly over the lawn, Mrs. Talmage described some plans she had made for the next day.

"Ike and Simon are going to hang bunting and lanterns from the branches of the trees, and Ned will place the piazza chairs and tables in groups, where the shade is inviting. Then, there is the lawn tennis court, which can be used for those who wish to play at ten cents a game. Ned will take charge of this and sell the tickets for playing. He will also sell the tickets for croquet, at five cents a game. I borrowed several croquet sets from neighbors, so there would be enough. Mrs. Catlin telephoned this morning that she thought a grab-bag, filled with all sorts of things, at five cents a grab, would prove interesting, as everyone likes to try the unknown. She offered to buy all these things and carry about the bag to-morrow. I thanked her in the name of the Nest, for I knew you would all be delighted at her suggestion."

"Oh, how nice!" exclaimed Norma, seconded by her sister.

"Won't it be fun!" cried Dot, all excitement at the prospect of the morrow.

"Mrs. Catlin's grab-bag will help a lot, won't it?" said Ruth.

"But I have still more good news to tell," continued Mrs. Talmage, while the little girls hushed their pleased voices to listen.

"Mr. Wells came over to see me last night, and told me that he had a new motion-picture machine sent to his wholesale stationery store, for sale. The owner is willing to rent it out to anyone, and I was asked if we would like to have a picture show and talk, after the bazaar articles were sold out."

"Oh! oh! What *did* you say?" gasped a chorus of voices.

"I said that, speaking for myself, I most gratefully accepted his offer to give the show for the Blue Birds, and I felt certain that they, too, would accept the donation with delight. Am I right?"

"Indeed you are!" cried the children.

"Well, we will have to use the carriage-house, which has a large floor, for the theater. Mr. Wells said the machine would be set up at the rear, and that long boards, set in rows like those

in a circus, would do for seats. The screens are going to be so arranged that they will look almost like a half-circle. I was told that this effect must be had to give the audience the sense of being surrounded."

"Why, there will be so much to do to-morrow, we won't have time to finish it by six," objected Betty.

"Oh, I think we will," replied Mrs. Talmage. "At any rate, we won't worry about that to-day, will we?"

"And shall we have the candy table, or not?" asked Dot.

"Oh, I almost forgot to tell you about that," said Mrs. Talmage. "The Bake-Shop lady sent me word that she would donate some candy for sale, and she spoke to the owner of the fruit store next door to her shop, and he immediately offered to send fruit, ginger-pop and soda. This will need constant attention, so Jinks and Meredith asked to be given charge of that stand, and I consented."

The Blue Birds heard all the wonderful news with great surprise, and at last Ruth said, "Our little bazaar is turning into a celebration, isn't it?"

"And think of the money you'll make," said Ned, who joined the party just as they reached the piazza.

"Why, that's so—we'll have more than enough to take a child to the country," cried Ruth, delightedly.

"To-morrow will show what we can do; let us not 'count our chickens before they are hatched,'" said Mrs. Talmage.

The girls were reminded to practice their exercises well and be prepared to receive the little feathers which would promote them to the degree Fledglings.

"And be sure to bring your Nestling costumes to-morrow morning, so we can have a rehearsal," reminded Mrs. Talmage, as they said good-by and started homeward.

Thursday, the fête-day, came as clear and beautiful as could be desired. The Blue Birds gathered early that morning, as there was so much to do before noon.

Simon and Ike, assisted by Ned, were very busy decorating the trees, and often called one of the girls to run for string, lanterns, or something left at the house.

Then, the tables had to be carried from the

kitchen and placed under the trees. Here the fancy articles made by the Blue Birds were displayed for sale.

As Annie saw the last table carried from her kitchen, she threw up both hands in despair and cried, "How does any of you expec' me to cook anything without a place to set it excep' on the floor!"

"Can't help it, Annie, we got to have 'em, that's all!" exclaimed Dot, as she managed to drag the coveted table out of the room.

A huge packing-case had been found in the barn, and it was hauled forth to be used for the soda-stand. A piece of white oil-cloth was laid over the top and the sides were draped with bunting, so that no one would have dreamed it was a box. Inside the case, Ike nailed up two boards to use as shelves to hold the bottles, and other things.

A smaller case was similarly covered and used for a fruit-stand.

The Blue Birds had placed a small table under one great oak tree, and spread out the peanut toys to good advantage. The clothespin family were upon another table under the elm tree; and the third table, which was the long one, stood

under the pergola by the fountain, and was well filled with fancy articles.

When twelve o'clock struck from the church tower, all that could be attended to had been done. The decorations were admired, the tables looked like a real church bazaar, and the visit to the carriage house showed that everything there was ready for the man who was going to take charge of the pictures. Ned had printed all the tickets that would be needed, and the admission tickets for the show were waiting in a box by the door of the carriage house.

With a last glance over everything, Mrs. Talmage told the Blue Birds to run home for lunch.

"Now don't be later than one-thirty," she said, "for you have to dress here, you know, and be ready to go through your exercises at two-thirty."

The children nodded eagerly, and ran off, while Ned, Ruth and Mrs. Talmage turned to go into the house.

"Are you going to leave everything out on the tables just like that?" asked Simon.

"Oh, yes, they are all right, Simon. No tramps ever come here, you know, and no one else is about to annoy us."

"I s'pose you're right, and no one would be so mean as to tamper with anything belonging to a benefit bazaar," admitted Simon, walking away, followed by Ike, toward the cottage where they lived together.

Now it chanced that a family of squirrels, whose nest was in an old tree near the cherry tree where the Blue Birds had located, often felt annoyed at their chatter and laughter. The squirrels had had undisturbed peace in finding and eating their meals until the Blue Birds came. Since then they had to seek a spot some distance from the Nest to enjoy peace and quiet.

The day of the bazaar, the Blue Birds were up and down the steps, in and out of the Nest, back and forth, with so much chatter and confusion, that Mr. Squirrel finally decided to peep and see what all the excitement was about. The Nest was empty—no table, no chairs; the lawn presented a most unusual aspect. Tables heaped with things, the chairs and tables standing about on the grass, and colored things dangling from the trees, which Mr. Squirrel was sure could not be a new kind of fruit. Then, too, the long colored things draped from tree to tree! It all was most distracting.

Mrs. Squirrel joined her husband, and peeping from among the leafy branches of their tree, said, "Suppose we go over and see what all their fussing was for."

"All right, my dear, but be careful not to step into any snares which might be laid there," advised Mr. Squirrel, as he assisted his wife down from the tree-trunk and hopped beside her until they reached the tables.

Here they sniffed disdainfully at the clothes-pin dolls, nosed about the fancy articles, and finally scented the peanuts.

"My, how wonderful! My dear, here is a whole tableful of lovely peanuts!" exclaimed Mr. Squirrel.

They both jumped up and found so many fresh-roasted peanuts that they wondered how to store them all so early in the season. However, Mrs. Squirrel said, "Let's eat what we want and then plan to carry the others home."

This sounded like common sense, so both squirrels began their feast.

"I never saw peanuts with such queer wrappings about them," said Mr. Squirrel, with exasperation.

"Nor I. Why, this one is sewn through and through with thread, and it gets caught in my teeth," complained Mrs. Squirrel.

"Most remarkable," added her husband. "Now, this nut looked just like a dog as it stood here upon wooden legs, but of course I knew it was a peanut by its smell. I find the legs were made of toothpicks. Now how do you suppose they grew in that nut?"

The squirrels continued their marauding and were almost satisfied, when a boy's voice was heard shouting across the lawn, "Uncle Ike, Uncle Ike, Tess and I are here!"

Ike was returning from his dinner when his nephew called to him. He came over the grass to meet them, and all three met near the peanut table. The squirrels were so busy crowding a few extra kernels into their mouths, that they failed to see anyone approaching. But before Ike could throw a stick at them, they scampered off up the tree trunk to a safe place hidden among the foliage.

Tommy and Tess stood looking at the havoc made among the peanut family by the squirrels, and were on the verge of tears, when the Blue Birds came from the house, hopping about like

merry songsters. Ike tried to make some repairs to the peanut toys, but half of them were beyond all help.

The Blue Birds ran over to welcome Tommy and Tess, and in another moment saw that something dreadful had happened to their funny little peanut family.

A cry of horror went up from two little girls when it was found that some of their cutest cows, chickens, and other animals were ruined.

As Mrs. Talmage crossed the lawn hastily to inquire into the cause of the wail she had heard, Ruth ran up and cried, with tears in her eyes, "Oh, mother! Our pets have been eaten!"

Ike explained about the squirrels, and the children heard about the catastrophe with a mingling feeling of sorrow and amusement. All further regret was cut short, however, for Mrs. Catlin's automobile chugged up the roadway and stopped by the side veranda. She called to Ike to help her lift the enormous bag from the car, and all the children ran up to see what it was like.

The huge denim bag was carried over to the elm tree, and then Mrs. Catlin heard of the recent bereavement caused by the untimely end of the peanuts.

The Blue Birds were not quite sure whether they felt badly over the destruction, or whether they felt like laughing.

"I'm glad we came along when we did, or all your peanuts would have been eaten," said Tommy.

"That's so," replied Ruth, thoughtfully. "I suppose we ought to feel happy to find *any* of the family left for us."

"All the same, I think the squirrels were mean to eat these when we would have given them all the undressed peanuts they wanted," retorted Dot, angrily.

"Well, they didn't know how much time we spent fixing them up, and they are not to blame for our leaving the tempting nuts lying about unprotected. But I do believe they feel as if they had to punish us for bothering about their home lately—you see they live in that big tree trunk that has a knot-hole in its side," explained Ruth.

"Dearies, there is no reason why the benefit should lose through the squirrels, so I will buy these damaged goods at the price asked for them."

And Mrs. Catlin deposited the sum in a tin box held by Ruth, and gathered the purchase into her handkerchief.

CHAPTER VI

A TRIP TO THE MOON

Soon visitors began to arrive, and no more thought was given to the mishaps of the peanut family. By two-thirty, a large crowd of ladies and children were scattered about the grounds laughing and talking and going about to view the articles for sale.

Promptly at two-thirty, Ned asked everyone to gather under the great elm tree, as the Blue Birds were going to go through their exercises.

Then the Blue Birds and their teacher came from the house and stood before the audience. The children were grouped in a semi-circle in front of Mrs. Talmage, dressed in their uniforms of grayish-blue, with the little blue-tipped feathers won for honors sewed upon their sleeves.

Mrs. Talmage explained to the interested audience just what the Blue Birds hoped to do, and

that just then they were going to show what had been accomplished by seven little Blue Birds in a month's time. The exercises of bending, bobbing, swaying, and fluttering were performed, and then the last blue-tipped feathers were presented to each little Blue Bird, for having accomplished the required number of deeds which permitted her to become a Fledgling. The feathers were attached to the gowns, and immediately after, Ned came up and stood holding a basket in which were seven blue-gray caps, trimmed with feathers. These were placed upon the heads of the Blue Birds and lo! Nestlings had changed to Fledglings.

The audience clapped their hands as the presentation of caps concluded the ceremony, and the little Blue Birds felt highly elated over the whole affair.

The bazaar continued with great success after that, and by four o'clock not an article was left unsold. The grab-bag attendant had been so busy that Tommy had to go about with her to assist at the sale.

At four-thirty, a horn sounded from the direction of the carriage house, and, as everyone held a ticket, the crowd hurried to see the motion-

picture show. On a long sheet of paper nailed up at the side of the entrance was printed:

A TRIP TO THE MOON
CONDUCTED BY
PROFESSOR SKYLARK.

As soon as all were assembled inside the theater, the door was closed, and the room was in total darkness, owing to the black cloth covering every place where light might enter.

After the eyes were accustomed to the darkness, one could see the faint outlines of a screen placed in front, in such a manner that it formed a half-circle, which reached to the benches on either side, and up in a dome-shape, until it stopped over the heads of the audience.

Mr. Wells stepped before the screen and said, "The unusual arrangement of the screens is to make you feel that you are moving, and not the pictures which will be thrown on the screen. By having them overhead, as well as along both sides, you will get the effect of motion from every side, somewhat like a train speeding past telegraph poles. You often wonder if the poles

are turning about—so real is the sensation conveyed by an optical illusion.

"We are going to produce the same effect with our pictures, so that you will believe you are ascending—up, up, up, to the sky. We do not intend to stop until a planet is reached, so, if any of you fear to sail in our ship to the moon, let them get right out, for we cannot stop to let you out after we have started."

Mr. Wells waited a moment, then said, "No one wants to get out, so we will proceed to haul in the anchor."

Some of the boys giggled, but soon hushed when the rattle of chains running through a hawser hole was heard in front of them.

"All aboard! We're off!" shouted Mr. Wells, as a whistle sounded and the chugging of an engine—not unlike the sound of an automobile—was heard.

"Now, as we move over the ground and prepare to rise, the engines must get up more steam."

The chug, chug, chug, sounded louder, and many of the children turned to see if it was back of them. A blinding light reflected from the camera was all that could be seen, and before they had turned their faces back toward the

screen again, a pale light broke all over the sheets. Soon, they were ascending from the earth, leaving meadows, rivers, hills, and all else beneath. The landscapes grew smaller and fainter, and the drifting clouds came floating nearer, until the audience felt that they were soaring up in an aeroplane. The clouds began to rush forward at greater speed, and they seemed heavier, until finally, Mr. Wells spoke:

"As we enter the realm of clouds, they seem almost tangible enough to catch hold of, but try it, and you will find nothing."

The clouds became beautiful colored mists, and as the ship sailed right through them, the children exclaimed in tones of admiration and awe.

"These clouds we are now passing through are colored by the reflection of the sun and other lights which radiate through this mist like a rainbow."

A few moments more of the marvelous colored clouds were enjoyed, when suddenly Mr. Wells called out: "Everyone look out! We are approaching a storm cloud!"

At the same time, the rosy tints faded, and threatening clouds seemed to engulf the ship. Then the rumbling of thunder was heard from

the rear, and a little girl started to whimper. Mr. Wells hastened to reassure the travelers that all were safe as long as they obeyed the captain's commands.

The illusion of soaring was so real that many in the audience took a firm hold of the bench, and some turned their heads to look behind and assure themselves that they were sitting still in the carriage house.

The trip through the storm lasted until the clouds grew almost black, then they turned a lighter gray, and always growing lighter, finally took on a silvery blue tone, until the ship sailed out into clear ether again.

"We have traveled several million miles since we left mother earth, and soon we shall approach Mars. Should anyone care to stop off and visit that planet, speak up now, so I can tell the engineer to stop the engines."

Several adult voices called out that they would like to stop, so Mr. Wells, who was the captain, shouted, "We'll stop off at Mars for a little visit, Mr. Engineer."

"Aye, aye, sir!" came from the back of the room, in reply to the captain's call.

"Now, if you look carefully, you can see a tiny

speck away out among the clouds. That is Mars. We are traveling toward it at the rate of several thousand miles a minute, and that is why it seems to grow larger so rapidly. Look again! Now you can see that it is really a planet. Do you see the outlines upon its surface? Look closely and you can distinguish its streams, hills, ravines, and other interesting formations."

A tense silence reigned after Mr. Wells' words. Finally, the ship seemed to fly so close that several children gasped, fearing a collision. This caused some amusement among the audience, but Mr. Wells kept up the illusion by saying, "We will just skirt about Mars a bit until we find a safe landing place."

The air-ship meantime sailed so close to the planet, as it sought for a harbor, that several times it seemed as if ship and star must crash together. The pilot knew his business, however, and guided the ship into a huge cleft of rock where the anchor was thrown out. Again the rattling chains sounded as they rushed through the hawser hole, and the motion of the ship ceased.

"Now, friends, step out with me, and visit some of the queer things of Mars," invited Mr. Wells.

A general sigh of relief sounded from the audience, which proved how real the trip had seemed. Now, however, the motion of the picture was from right to left, and it seemed to the travelers that they were moving from left to right on Mars.

"See this wonderful vegetation, a variety unknown to us on earth," said Mr. Wells, as great fungi appeared, some growing a hundred feet high. Others seemed to creep along the surface and cling to the rough rocks. Gorgeous flowers of unusual coloring blossomed from giant stalks, or from hanging vines that swung from tall cacti.

"All this queer rock formation is the result of terrific volcanic explosions which rent the planet many ages ago," continued Mr. Wells.

The captain led the audience along deep chasms, over glaciers, through the craters of extinct volcanoes, until it seemed that everything of importance had been seen. Then he said, "We had better go on board our ship again, as we have many other places to view before we reach the Moon."

Now again, the pictures moved from top to bottom, causing the ship to rise, apparently.

"We will not be able to stop off at any of the

other planets, as we would not be able to return in time for dinner to-night, if we stopped too often. But I can point out many interesting things as we pass upward.

"Now, turn your face toward the sun and you will see a planet near it, whose name is Mercury. Just outside the pathway of Mercury is Venus. Mercury is the smallest planet we see, and even then it is never very distinct—sometimes invisible entirely excepting at certain periods of the year.

"Venus is very friendly to our earth, however, and always shines on us with a bright smile. Venus and the Earth are about the same size, so they are termed the sister planets.

"It has been thought by astronomers that the brilliancy of Venus is caused by clouds that surround it and reflect the sun's light directly upon the planet.

"Have you ever noticed the blinding light of a great white cloud moving in the clear sky? So it is with the clouds about Venus. They hide the planet from us, however, so that we cannot see through them to distinguish whether there are any oceans or land on Venus."

Mr. Wells waited while the clouds passed

swiftly by, until another planet shone out of the ether.

"We now turn our eyes to behold the planet called Jupiter. He is the biggest of the sun's family, and is more than 1300 times larger than our old earth. Just think of it!

"Jupiter has at least eight moons, and if we could but see him closer, it would be a wonderful sight to look at all those moons shining at once.

"Four of them are so small that we cannot see them plainly from the vast distance that separates us. Then again, four of these moons are so large that we can view them with an ordinary telescope. Jupiter's moons travel about him just as our moon journeys about the earth.

"If you look sharply, you will also see that Jupiter, besides having eight moons, has streaks of clouds across his face. These clouds are called belts, which change their shape, and form various pictures just as our earth-clouds do. They are of most delicate coloring, changing from yellow, reddish-brown, and orange-gray, to faint blue and green. Very often some great white clouds lie near the colored ones, and add to their beauty.

"Jupiter is very large, but he rotates very

quickly upon his axis, turning in less than ten hours. Years ago, a great red spot appeared near the center of Jupiter. It formed in a large spoon-shaped spot and remained to vex astronomers who studied it for forty years. They could never determine what it could be, and many inquiries failed to reveal any fact concerning it. Of recent years it has faded until it is now but a faint gray mark. No one has ever put forth a reasonable theory regarding it."

While the ship sailed on and Jupiter seemed to sink to the bottom, another wonder appeared.

"I will now tell you about one of the most beautiful sights in the heavens. This is Saturn and its rings. Saturn's rings do not shine by their own light, but by the reflected light of the sun. If you ever have a chance of looking through a telescope, be sure to seek for Saturn's rings, dark, light, or gauzy. Then look for the ten moons that accompany Saturn in his travels.

"Beyond the planet Saturn are two others: Neptune and Uranus. They are so far from us, however, that we know but little of them.

"Friends, we have had a most enjoyable trip while viewing the planets, and now we are swinging back again toward the Earth, and as we get

near the Moon, we must turn our attention to studying it.

"If you look steadily, you will see that all over the surface of the moon are great mountain ranges and volcanoes. Now, watch patiently! See the sunrise over the tops of those peaks, just as it rises over the mountain-tops on our earth. The moon is very much like the earth, although smaller; but its great difference is that it is *dead*. That is, its seas are dried up, no flowers or trees grow upon its surface, and no beings live upon it.

"Men have watched the moon for many years, but never notice any change in its surface. In the middle of it, you will see a great ring-shaped mass with a peak lifting its head from the center. This is a great crater of an extinct volcano. Possibly, at a time many ages ago, while the moon was young and active, this volcano shot forth great masses of rock and lava which fell and made the ring that surrounds the crater. There are many volcanoes on the moon which have formed these rough rings in erupting.

"The moon does not present a very inviting place to visit, but its desolate stillness and barren sights will make us more content with old earth.

"One more crater I should like to show you before we leave the moon. That is the crater Copernicus—one of the largest and most beautiful of the moon mountains. It is so large that as the sun rises from the left-hand side of the moon, the shadow cast is deep and far over its tip. Many of the dark shadows, or markings, of the moon have never been fathomed. Astronomers have puzzled over these dark marks, but as yet none has given a satisfactory explanation.

"Now, friends and fellow-travelers, our airship will drop right down to the earth again and I shall try to land you as near the Blue Birds' Bazaar as possible. Do not get out, please, until the anchor is fast, and the sun shines through this dark cloud."

As Mr. Wells spoke, the clouds flew up and the ship seemed to descend so suddenly that the children gasped. Soon, the earth's scenes appeared again, and the noise of the anchor chain sounded distinctly.

Then the dark covers were removed from the windows, and the doors thrown open. The sunlight streamed in to show the travelers that they were back at Mossy Glen.

As the audience rose to pass out, Mrs. Tal-

The Blue Birds Gathered About Mrs. Talmage, While She Counted the Receipts.

mage stood up and called: "Let us give a cheer for the valiant captain who took us through such dangerous clouds and showed the wonders of the planets, and landed us safely at home!"

The cheer was taken up, and a "Hip, hip, hurrah!" rang out to thank Mr. Wells.

Mr. Wells smiled as he led the way out to the lawn, where every vestige of a bazaar had been cleared away while the explorers were absent.

The visitors heard with amazement that it was after six o'clock, and hurriedly said good-by to each other and went home.

The Blue Birds gathered about Mrs. Talmage while she counted the receipts, and were astonished to find they had a fund of sixty-seven dollars—immense wealth it seemed to them.

Ned went to his den to write up all the interesting news about the bazaar, while Mrs. Talmage placed the fund in the little tin bank, and showed the children just where she put it, in the safe.

"There we will leave it until we go to the city to find the child," said Mrs. Talmage, going out to the porch to say good-night to each Blue Bird.

CHAPTER VII

THE BLUE BIRDS' SUMMER BOARDERS

Directly after breakfast the day following the Bazaar, Ruth and Ned insisted upon their mother opening the safe to see if the fund was all right.

"Did you think it might take wings and fly away, or do you expect to see an additional amount added to it for interest?" laughed Mrs. Talmage, as she turned the knob of the safe to find the combination.

"Oh, mother!" retorted Ruth, deprecatingly.

"We just wanted to look at the lump of money, and open the bills, to feel how great it is to earn a sum like this," added Ned.

"But do not lose sight of the fact that money itself is useless—it is the employment of this fund that makes it feel 'great,'" said Mrs. Talmage, gently.

The two children hovered over the table counting out the money and placing all safely back in the little box. It was locked in the safe, and then

Mrs. Talmage said, "I think we had better discuss the question of using that fund. It is almost ten o'clock, and the Blue Birds will be waiting at the Nest for us."

The children needed no urging, but hurried off, followed by Mrs. Talmage.

Arrived at the Nest, they found several of the children there, and the others soon came running across the lawn.

"Well, Blue Birds, we are going to decide a most important matter this morning—that of taking a trip to the City to find our little sick child," said Mrs. Talmage, after the roll-call.

"I suppose I had better stay to hear, so the *Chirp* can have a fine article about it," ventured Ned.

"Oh, of course!" rejoined the Blue Birds, as they settled down comfortably to listen to Mrs. Talmage.

"Now, one of the first things to consider is the matter of a place to board her—or him."

The Blue Birds had quite overlooked that important detail, and sat in deep thought for a few moments.

"Why not ask Tommy's mother if he can board on the farm?" suggested Ned. "Ike said his sis-

ter would like to earn a little extra money some way so she could send the children to our school next term."

"I think Tommy and Tess will like that, too, and the poor little fellow that comes from the city will like to play with the two children," added Norma.

"*He* may be a dear little girl, you know," ventured Ruth.

"You're right, Fluff," laughed Ned; "but wouldn't you think it funny if you should happen to find twins that needed the country air?"

"I think twins are much nicer than just common children," retorted Dot, who had a twin brother named Donald.

"Oh, goodness, I never thought of such a thing!" exclaimed Betty.

"Would there be money enough to pay for two, in case we have to take more than one, mother?" asked Ruth, anxiously.

"That will all depend on how much board will have to be paid," replied Mrs. Talmage. "It might be a good idea to take a country walk over to Tommy's and find out if the child can be boarded, and how much a week it will cost."

The Blue Birds were all in favor of the sug-

gestion, so, led by Ned, they trudged off through the woods.

The Mason farm was about a mile and a half from Mossy Glen, but the day was cool and the walk seemed very short to the happy Blue Birds.

Mrs. Mason sat under an apple tree shelling peas, as the children came along the path from the woods. She half arose to take them into the house, but Mrs. Talmage begged her to remain just where she was, for they would rather sit on the grass than in the house. Tommy and Tess heard the voices and hurried around from the back porch to see who it could be.

"Tommy, you take my big glass pitcher and carry it carefully to the milk-house. You will find a can of cold butter-milk from my mornin's churnin'. Fill the pitcher and bring it here. Tess, you can bring out the glasses from the front-room cupboard," directed Mrs. Mason, thinking how delicious a drink of cool butter-milk would be to the little visitors.

Tommy ran off to do his mother's bidding, while Tess went into the house and soon returned with a tray of glasses. When the foaming butter-milk had been poured and handed about, the Blue Birds sipped it with appreciation.

Then Mrs. Talmage broached the subject that brought them to the farm that day.

Mrs. Mason was a practical little woman, and, as Mrs. Talmage explained about the city child, she figured rapidly over the cost. When Mrs. Talmage asked about taking in two children, should it turn out that two in a family had to come, Mrs. Mason thought carefully before answering.

"I could afford to take two with very little extra cost above what one would cost," she announced. "Of course, you will visit the family yourself, won't you, and see that no child is brought that is not a fit companion for Tommy and Tess?"

"Most certainly!" declared Mrs. Talmage. "I am going to telephone to a bureau which is conducted for the purpose of keeping all information about the city children for folks who will take them to the country during the summer. After I get all the information I can, we will go in and select the child."

"Well, then, I guess I can board a boy for four dollars a week, two boys for seven; a girl will cost three-fifty a week, and two of 'em, six. A boy eats twice as much as a girl at this age, as

I can prove by Tommy and Tess, and that 'counts for the extra fifty cents."

"Then, I suppose there will be a little washing for the child, for which we will pay fifty cents every week, if you wish to do it, or we will send it to some laundress," added Mrs. Talmage.

"Oh, I will do it right in with my children's; it would hardly be worth fifty cents, though," answered Mrs. Mason.

"According to that—seven into sixty-seven dollars goes nine and four over," figured Mrs. Talmage, then turning to the Blue Birds, said, "Children, you can keep two children out here for nine weeks, and pay four dollars for the washing."

"Oh, Mother Wings, are you sure!" cried Ruth, delightedly.

"Why, that's all vacation—most!" exclaimed Dot, eagerly.

"Do you really mean that the few days' work the Blue Birds did will mean so much help?" asked Ned, amazed.

"Yes, just think of it! And more, my Blue Birds, no one can see into the future to appre-

ciate the result of bringing some little waif out here," smiled Mrs. Talmage.

"And at the same time, almost pay the taxes for a whole year at your school!" sighed Mrs. Mason, thankfully.

"Then, we will try to find two children, and let you know to-morrow night just what we did in the city, and when the children may be expected to arrive," said Mrs. Talmage, rising to go.

Mrs. Mason accompanied her visitors to the gate, while Tommy walked beside Ned.

"I got a new customer for eggs last week," said Tommy, "through the ad. in the *Chirp*. An' this week Mrs. Catlin an' some of her friends started orderin' my best fresh eggs, an' some spring chickens for every Saturday."

"That so? My, I'm glad to hear it. I won't feel so small about charging rates for the advertising after this," exclaimed Ned.

As soon as Mrs. Talmage reached home, she asked the children to wait on the veranda while she called up the information office she had spoken of to Mrs. Mason. The children interested themselves in making plans to entertain

their protégés from the city until Mrs. Talmage returned to tell them what she had learned.

"The man who answered the telephone said they had a long list of names and addresses on hand, and he would be only too happy to give us a copy of it. He says that they try to keep a record of the morals and class of the families where these children are, so as not to associate one grade of child with those they would be injured by. All children are admitted to this list, but they are graded."

"If we have to wait for the list we won't be able to go to the city for some days," said Ruth, regretfully.

"Oh, yes, we can," responded Mrs. Talmage, smilingly. "I thought of that too, so I asked the man to please send a messenger with the list to Mr. Wells' office. We can get it from him to-night when he comes from business. The man said he certainly would, and if there was anything further we wished to know he would be at our service. I thanked him, and there you are—about to start for the city in the morning at nine o'clock!"

The Blue Birds felt elated at the success of their plan thus far, and bade Mrs. Talmage

good-night, with repeated promises to be at the station on time in the morning.

The next day came clear and cool, so the trip to the city promised to be enjoyable. Ike brought the car around at eight-thirty, and the Talmages got in and started off. Halfway to the station, however, they overtook Betty and her father going down the street. Betty's father was connected with a large automobile company, and his offices were in the city. Mrs. Talmage had Ike stop the car while Mr. Stevens and Betty got in.

"Aren't you taking a late train, Mr. Stevens?" asked Mrs. Talmage, after he and Betty were seated.

"Yes, but I did so on purpose to take the train you do. When Betty told me about the proposed trip to the city to-day, I immediately thought of the difficulty you would have in taking all the children through those crowded streets where you will have to go to visit the homes you have on your list. I hear that Mr. Wells brought the list from the city last night, and he told me of the district most of the children live in. This morning Mrs. Stevens and I talked it over, and I decided to take you to my office and send you about in one of our manufacturer's cars. This

will protect the children while you are in houses interviewing mothers and children. I have one chauffeur who is married and has children of his own, and he will take good care of the Blue Birds entrusted to him."

"Oh, that will be splendid, Mr. Stevens!" replied Mrs. Talmage, delightedly. "I brought Ned to help me pilot the girls across the streets in the city, but your offer is greatly appreciated."

"Well, since Betty became a Blue Bird, we noticed such improvement in every way, that we thought we ought to do what we could to make your undertaking easier, and this is one way," said Mr. Stevens.

Just then Ike stopped the car at the station, and a chorus of childish voices shouted, "Here they are!" Mrs. Talmage was almost dragged down from the step as five eager children took hold of her skirts in their eagerness to help her out of the automobile. Quite a crowd of people, waiting for the train, stood by, smiling at the chattering of the Blue Birds as they hopped about their Mother Wings.

The children were so interested in their project, and had so much to talk about, that the train landed them in the big Pennsylvania station be-

fore they hardly realized that they had started.

Mr. Stevens assisted Mrs. Talmage in marshaling the children to the trolley which would take them directly to his Broadway salesroom, and here they had to wait only a few minutes before Otto, the chauffeur, was ready with a large automobile to drive them to the East Side.

Having once gained the East Side, Otto was compelled to go slowly as so many children played about the streets, and push-carts of all kinds stood about, and continually got in front of the machine. The Blue Birds, never having seen such sights, opened their eyes in dismay as the narrow, dirty streets were traversed; some of the streets being, indeed, nothing more than ill-smelling alleys.

Ruth's heart swelled until her eyes overflowed with tears of pity for the poor little tots crowding the grimy steps of the tenement houses. Many little girls not as old as she, with old-looking faces, round shoulders and tired arms, dragged about heavy babies who needed the air but could not walk. Groups of half-dressed boys from seven years down sat upon the ground playing marbles with rotten plums or stones, while others raced back and forth in face of danger.

"Oh, oh, oh!" cried Ruth when the scene proved too much for her. "If I could only gather every one of them up in my arms and fly away with them to our beautiful woods!"

The other children were only too sympathetic and Ruth's exclamation started their tears; but Ned, being a boy, could not stand tears, so he tried to change their thoughts by saying, "Oh, your good intentions are all right, Fluff, but what would all these poor tots do in the woods if a thunder-storm came up at night?"

Ruth darted a look of rebuke at her brother.

"You can poke fun at Fluff if you like," cried Dot, "but I feel just as she does, and so I'm going to save all my candy money on Saturdays until I've got enough to take one of those poor tired girls with wrinkled old faces away from here."

Mrs. Talmage had said nothing for some time. "Blue Birds," she said finally, "wouldn't it be just lovely if we could start Nests for all of these children in the city? They might use a school-room for their meeting places, and go to the parks and public playgrounds."

"Yes, yes, mother!" exclaimed Ruth. "Will

you write to Headquarters and see if they will please start Nests at once?"

"I think they must have thought of such an idea, and there must be plenty of young women who would volunteer to mother the little Blue Birds, at least once a week. I will write, however, and offer what help I can to further the plan."

"But Dot's idea was good, too, and we must try to get more money so as to take more children out to Oakdale," added Ned.

Meantime, Otto had found the first address on the list, and stopped at the sidewalk.

The moment the automobile stopped, a crowd of curious children formed about the car, gaping at the rosy-cheeked little girls with their crisp white dresses, and ribboned hats; but oh, ye wonders! these finely gowned children, who seemed like the fairies in the story books, had come there to *visit* some one! The word passed swiftly from one to another that the lovely lady was going to get out. Mrs. Talmage never dreamed of the awe she was causing in the minds of the neglected children when she looked at them with such loving pity, and stooped to pat a miserable little hunchback boy on the head.

The Blue Birds could not all accompany Mrs. Talmage into the house, yet everyone felt eager to visit the child whose name was on the list. So Ruth was urged to go first, although she felt they were too partial with her. Ned said he would go first and see what the interior was like; so, followed by his mother and Ruth, he entered the dark hallway. Some of the street children went after them, but soon returned to the street, where all the children in the automobile could be watched and admired.

"We must look for Room 19," said Mrs. Talmage, as they started up a flight of narrow dirty stairs.

By the light from a tiny gas-jet at the head of the first flight Ned read the numbers on the doors and found that they only went to eight on that floor.

"It must be up one more flight," said Ned, as he led the way.

The stairs were darker, and the hand-rail shaky on this flight, but the flickering jet of light in the side wall of the corridor showed the visitors that the numbers on that floor ran from nine to fourteen.

"Goodness, mother, I hate to have you go up

another one like the others," ventured Ned, standing at the foot of the third flight.

Mrs. Talmage, however, with mouth drawn tight and her eyes expressing a feeling such as her children never saw before, motioned Ned to proceed. They climbed this last flight of worn, broken-in steps, and found the door on that hallway which read "19."

Mrs. Talmage knocked upon the thin panel of the door, while Ruth and Ned clung to each other wondering if all this was a terrible nightmare, or did people really live in such awful houses!

A voice called to them to "Come in," and they entered a room which looked almost as dark as the hall they left. The two windows at the rear, which should have given light and air, were darkened by the washing which hung on the fire-escape just outside. The room felt stifling with a small coal-stove throwing out its heat for cooking and ironing, and no ventilation of the room except the windows mentioned. Two doors opposite the windows opened into small dark places which the visitors learned later were bedrooms. They were not as large as the closets off Mrs. Talmage's bedrooms at home, and had

no other air than that coming from the door leading to the living room.

The voice that bade the visitors enter belonged to a pale, thin woman, who held an infant upon one arm, while she tried to stir a pot of gruel with the other hand. A little girl of about five years sat upon the floor carefully handling a ragged sheet of the comic section of a Sunday paper. The little girl was in her nightie, but seemed not to mind that. But the name of the child they sought, Jamie Ferris, was that of a boy, and where was he?

All these things had been noted before Mrs. Ferris recovered from her surprise at seeing such visitors in her home. Then, dusting a wooden chair, she placed it for the strange lady. Ned and Ruth found chairs by the table and sat down also. Mrs. Talmage referred to her list.

"I had your name sent me," she began, "as having two children, one sick boy called Jamie, and a delicate child named Alice, who were in need of fresh air."

"Yes'm," replied Mrs. Ferris. "This is Alice, but she isn't dressed. All of her clothes are in the wash," indicating the washing on the line outside the window.

"Then there is Jamie, age nine. Is he not at home?" asked Mrs. Talmage.

"Oh, yes'm, Jamie is in bed and can't get about. I was just cooking his dinner for him."

"I didn't know he was sick; the paper merely stated that he was sickly. I was not prepared to find him in bed," said Mrs. Talmage, with ready sympathy.

"Well, he isn't sick enough now to have a doctor, but all spring he was pretty bad. What he needs now is things to eat and fresh wholesome air to breathe, but we haven't either. The last time the doctor came here from the Board of Health, he said we *must* follow those orders if we wanted him to live. But, madam, what *shall* I do?" cried the mother with torn heart, looking about the room, then toward the bedroom, lastly into the pan where boiled the unappetizing watery oatmeal.

Ruth thrust a handkerchief into her mouth to keep back sobs which threatened to break forth, and Ned turned his head away to hide his tear-filled eyes.

"Dear heart," replied Mrs. Talmage, "I can imagine how you feel. So helpless is our strength with human love! But thank God, He knows

your need and will meet it with all the love and help you can use. Perhaps we have been sent by Him in answer to your heart's cry for succor."

Mrs. Ferris covered her eyes with her hand. "Just as you knocked at the door," she returned, "I gritted my teeth and said, 'God, I have prayed and prayed *and prayed* for help, and You have not heard! Now, hear me, or I will curse your name forever, after my boy is gone!' And just see, madam, He had you here even while I rebelled at His cruelty."

"Ah, dear sister, and more than that did He plan, and is now perfecting, for to-day Blue Birds meet in many places to work and help and sing to make life easier for everyone. I have with me to-day seven little girls who formed a Blue Birds' Nest and earned money enough to take two children to the country. If you will let me talk with Jamie I should like it very much, as the other children are waiting in the street."

Mrs. Ferris showed the visitors into the hot little room which was almost filled with a double-sized wooden bed. There was only a narrow space about a foot wide through which one could crowd to get into the bed.

A white-faced sickly boy lay upon the bed, his eyes so lusterless that one wondered if sight had left him. He had heard strange voices in the adjoining room, but was too listless to be interested in what was said. As his mother called to him that visitors were present, he rolled his wide eyes up and smiled ever so faintly.

Mrs. Talmage stooped over, and took his thin little hand.

"Jamie," she said, "would you like to spend the summer in the country?"

Immediately a new light flitted over his face, and he looked a different child.

"I think we can arrange it," she continued, "and you must cheer up and get strong so you can stand the journey."

"I brought the Blue Birds to the city to-day to find two children who needed country air," said Mrs. Talmage, addressing the mother again. "We still have several places to visit, but I feel confident that Jamie will be one of the two chosen."

The mother's face looked really beautiful, in spite of the careworn lines, as she smiled and thanked her visitor.

"I shall be too grateful for words if Jamie is

Mrs. Talmage Stooped Over, and Took His Thin Little Hand.

chosen," she said, "but I must not urge it, as there may be other children in worse plight than he."

Mrs. Talmage wondered at the refinement of thought expressed by the poor woman, and looked about the room again, before leaving. This time she saw a machine standing near one window, and a table piled high with unfinished garments.

"Could you get the children ready to start the day after we send you word?" asked Mrs. Talmage.

"I would do anything to give them this opportunity," replied Mrs. Ferris. "The time I lose getting them ready I can make up again after they are safe in the country. And I am sure you will not regret having our two children about, for we were not always in this neighborhood, but had to come here when my husband was hurt and there was no one to earn money but me. Then Jamie took sick, and we had medicine to buy all winter, besides paying doctors' bills for my husband's illness. Some day we may be able to save enough to get away from here, but not this year."

As the three silent ones went down the stairs

and out to the waiting car, the children noticed that they all looked very sad and depressed.

Otto waited quietly for the next address, and then Mrs. Talmage told the Blue Birds all about the poor children up in No. 19. Tears came to the eyes of the sympathetic listeners, and Betty cried, "Oh, Mrs. Talmage, why didn't you bring them right along?"

"That wouldn't have been practical, dearie, but I think Jamie ought to be chosen as one of the children."

"Oh, yes, yes! we must take Jamie," cried the chorus.

Of the twenty other addresses selected by Mrs. Talmage, over two-thirds were deserving, where illness, reverses, or death caused poverty where prosperity had once reigned. These cases were marked by Mrs. Talmage, for she had made up her mind to see what could be done to give all these children at least a week in God's open country.

So it transpired that Jamie and his little sister were the two selected for the first venture of the Blue Birds' summer boarders. As the automobile passed through the street where Mrs. Ferris lived, Otto was told to stop, and Mrs. Tal-

mage was about to get out. The chauffeur offered to run upstairs for her, however, so Ned and he carried the good news to the happy mother, to have the children ready to go the following afternoon, when the machine would call for them.

As Otto drove the Blue Birds to the railroad station he noticed their silence. Then Ruth said, "Oh, if there could be *some* way that all of those dears could have a visit in the country."

"I've been thinking that maybe our *Chirp* can tell this story of what we saw to-day, so that everyone will get stirred up over it, and offer to help us," suggested Ned.

"Ned, I really believe you have thought of a way to tell others how much these poor darlings need the country, and the *Chirp* can do that better than we could personally. I'll write up the story and you can change it where you see fit, and print it so that Saturday's issue will hold the account of this trip," said Mrs. Talmage.

That night Ike was sent over to his sister's with the news that two children, a brother and sister, would arrive the next day at five.

CHAPTER VIII

A FOURTH OF JULY CHRISTMAS TREE

Mrs. Mason had two little rooms, with dormer windows, on the second floor of her cottage, and these she decided to have the children from the city occupy. Each room had a single cot, bureau and chair; ruffled swiss curtains draped the diamond-paned window, and a home-woven rag rug lay in front of each bed. Both rooms were sweet and inviting, and to city children, accustomed to dark, crowded closet-like rooms, would seem like paradise.

Tommy and Tess were duly expectant, and had planned many sight-seeing excursions about the farm for their boarders. There was a baby calf, a new brood of chicks, some squirrels who had just moved into a hole in their favorite chestnut tree, and many other equally important things to be seen. They little dreamed that the most commonplace dandelion and blades of grass would be novel delights to these city children, and

as for chicks, or a calf!—wonders upon wonders all these strange creatures would prove to be!

The afternoon the Ferris children were to come Otto was sent down to the alley with the car, and Mrs. Ferris, with the two children, was waiting. Mr. Stevens waited at his office for the car to return, and he took Mrs. Ferris' place by the side of the awed children. The mother kissed them both good-by, with tears of joy in her eyes, and thanked Mr. Stevens again and again for the blessing he and his friends were bestowing.

Otto drove the car to the station where Mr. Stevens and the children took the train for Oakdale.

Mrs. Talmage advised the Blue Birds to remain on the piazza at Mossy Glen, while she went to the station with Ike to receive the two children.

The train came in, and Mr. Stevens had to carry the frail little boy from the car to the automobile. Mrs. Talmage saw at once that the unusual excitement was proving too much for him, so they had Ike drive straight to his sister's farm. There Jamie was put in bed and

given a nice warm supper which soon made him fall asleep.

Mrs. Talmage waited with Mrs. Mason until the lad was sleeping peacefully before they went downstairs. Mr. Stevens had been superintending the supper of the Mason children and their little guest, so all was going well when Mrs. Talmage and Mr. Stevens left the cottage.

The Blue Birds had grown very impatient at the non-arrival of the two children, and were greatly surprised to see Ike drive in from the back road without them. Mrs. Talmage was the only passenger in the car, Mr. Stevens having been dropped at his home.

"Why, where are they?" gasped Betty.

"Didn't they come?" asked several disappointed voices.

"Oh, yes, they're here, but Jamie was too weak to do anything but go to bed, so we took them right to the farm," said Mrs. Talmage. "He was asleep when we left, and I feel sure that in a few days he will be able to go outdoors with the other children."

Ned came out on the veranda while his mother was explaining, and said, "Now, isn't that too

bad? We all wanted to see them before they went to their new home."

"I think it's just horrid, after all the money we saved to bring them here," pouted Edith.

"Well, I'm disappointed too," said Ruth, "but we must not feel as if we owned the children, just because we earned the money to bring them here; that would be selfish, and no sacrifice at all."

"Right you are, Fluff!" said Ned, patting his sister on the head.

"Now," said Mrs. Talmage, "I'm sure it's time my little Blue Birds were finding their own nests for the night, so if you will get into the car, Ike will take you all home."

Saying this, she got out, and helped the children in, telling them to be sure to attend the meeting at ten in the morning, as she wanted to tell them of some ideas for helping a few more city children.

But Ike was not permitted to start the automobile until his little passengers had heard all about the safe arrival of the two Ferris children. Then they shouted a merry good-night.

The next morning at ten all the Blue Birds

were in their Nest waiting impatiently for Mrs. Talmage to tell them her plans.

"I'm sure everyone here wants to help in any work done to bring some more children to the country, don't you?" asked Mrs. Talmage, after the roll-call, which really was superfluous, as not one of the Blue Birds could have been kept away from their Nest.

"Yes, indeed!" cried the chorus of voices.

"Then I will tell you what I thought out last night as I sat wondering how to help. I saw a way in which we might bring out fifty children, if we can earn the money to pay the bills."

The children sat astonished at the number, and waited breathlessly for Mrs. Talmage to tell them about her idea.

"Our new school-house is always closed during vacations, and the gymnasium and recreation rooms unused all summer. These might be turned to good account if the Board of Education will grant us permission to use the recreation rooms for dormitories, and the gymnasium for a dining-room for the children. Of course, we must have a committee who will see that nothing is injured and that everything is left in as perfect order as it is found. I have thought of

having Mrs. Catlin organize this committee and act as its head. If we can secure the schoolhouse, our next work will be to raise a fund to buy cots, bedding and food. That work must be planned and carried out by the Blue Birds."

"Oh, what a wonderful plan, but how can we do it?" said May.

"It's too bad folks don't want to come to a bazaar every week—we could earn money that way," added Norma.

"Father is so interested in the Blue Birds now, that he wants me to tell him everything we said or did as soon as he comes home," laughed Frances.

"So are my mother and father," said Betty. "Father says he wished more ladies would do what Mrs. Talmage is doing, because it is a great thing to see seven little girls growing to be good unselfish citizens."

"Now, then, that's fine news, Betty," laughed Mrs. Talmage. "For we will certainly make your father, who is the head of the Board of Education, call a meeting to see what can be done about the school building."

"I'm sure father will do it, for he told mother it was too bad Oakdale didn't have a Town

House, because it would be just the place to shelter some children," joyously cried Betty.

"Fine! Now, I'm sure he will use his influence with the other members of the Board," replied Mrs. Talmage.

When Betty went home that day she carried an invitation to her mother and father to spend the evening with Mrs. Talmage.

As the three friends sat talking over many things that night, the conversation gradually turned into the plan to help more children. Mrs. Talmage had the faculty of making others see exactly what she was thinking of, and when she told a story, her audience generally felt all the impressions she meant them to feel. As she told of the heart-breaking scenes witnessed in the city the day the Blue Birds sought for some children, Mr. and Mrs. Stevens had to use great control not to give way to tears.

Then she explained her plan about the school-building. As she outlined the idea, Mr. Stevens sat up and grew eager. As Mrs. Talmage concluded, he said:

"I am deeply interested in the Blue Birds' work; more than I ever was in the Boy Scouts or Camp Fire Girls, both of which are fine as

far as they go, but in my estimation they do not start soon enough with the child. I have watched and studied children very closely, and it is my opinion that a child at twelve is too far developed in character to make much of an impression. In this Blue Bird plan I can see a wonderful opportunity to mold the thought of the child at the proper age. I am most grateful to have Betty reap the benefit of this Nest, and anything I can do to prove my thanks I will surely do. I only wish there was some way in which every parent could be made to understand the importance of this great undertaking."

Mrs. Talmage listened with amazed gratification to the heartfelt expression of this man who could be such a powerful ally. After a moment's hesitation, while Mrs. Talmage wondered just what to say, he continued:

"I have a strong appreciation for anything in connection with city waifs. I give generously to the various organizations formed to help poor city children. Perhaps you do not know that I was a stray child on the city streets long ago. My father and mother died during the awful epidemic of small-pox that scourged the city when I was young, and I am well qualified to

judge any phase of this life for the young. Impersonal charity is very good, but charitable help that makes one work is the best, for it touches our heart with its appeal. I think your plan of taking our spoiled children to the city to see for themselves the conditions the city children have to endure was splendid, for it will cause our own little ones to think seriously and consider their less fortunate friends."

"Mr. Stevens, with such a great desire to help humanity, why is it that you should be accredited with holding aloof and being distant to your associates? Don't you know that you are misjudged by those who would gladly work with you to raise the standard of conditions for the poor?" said Mrs. Talmage, earnestly.

"Yes, I know what people think, but I cannot help myself. If I had not been overpowered by the feeling that this was my opportunity to get you to help me with poor children, I could never have said what I have to-night. It is the result of my boyish experiences, and there were none that tended to soften or uplift my soul. When I was orphaned, I was taken in by a rough man who had a peddlers' cart. I worked for him from seven in the morning until ten at night, and then

was kicked upon a straw mat to sleep. I was fed the decayed fruits or vegetables he could not sell. From six years of age until I was ten I suffered this maltreatment through fear of worse should I run away. I knew boys who would have thought my life a heaven to what they endured. At ten the old peddler disappeared: he may have been arrested, or he may have been injured and taken to a hospital—I never knew. But I was alone in the world at last.

"The Gerry society was not very strong in those days, and many children shifted for themselves.

"Finally I heard from the boy who occupied the mat with me, that he had found work in a machine shop on the west side. I went with him the next day, and was engaged to fetch and carry oil, rags, and tools, for the mechanics working in the factory. The small sum paid me every week seemed a fortune then, for it was the first money I ever had. From that work I was promoted, step by step, until I was finally made oiler myself with boys to run my errands. I never forgot how it felt to be down-trodden, and I treated all my inferiors as I would be treated by others. I attended night-school with some

other boys, and kept up my studies until I was able to attend a course in mechanics.

"Then, when the automobile business started to boom, I was able to prove my knowledge of tools, machines and mechanics, and I floated up on top of the wave that washed fortune into my life. But the crest of that wave could never help me to forget the sharp kicks and curses hurled at me when I was a homeless boy. That is why I feel so pent up and speechless when in society, and more at ease when doing something to help destitute or homeless children."

Mrs. Talmage sat with heart and head full of sympathy for this noble man whose story she had just heard, and she wondered how many of her acquaintances would bow in recognition of his prowess. After a short silence Mrs. Stevens said, "But John did not tell you the finest part of his story."

"Hush, dear, that is another story entirely," remonstrated Mr. Stevens.

"No, you have told Mrs. Talmage part, and I shall tell the rest," continued his wife. "When his mother and father died they lived in a nice home with every comfort. A man who claimed to be an uncle of John's came in when the health

officers removed the victims of the plague, and sold out everything in the house. In a week's time the man disappeared and John, having nothing to live upon, and being too young to understand anything, drifted into the clutches of the old peddler. I have often urged my husband to seek justice and claim the property which belonged to his parents, but he says, 'Judgment is mine, saith the Lord.'"

"Come now," interrupted Mr. Stevens, cheerily, "let us hear Mrs. Talmage's entire plans for the children's exodus from the city."

Mrs. Talmage respected her guest's reticence, and began a detailed explanation of the needs and money to bring out a large number of children.

Mr. Stevens sat thinking for a few minutes.

"I read in one of the papers," he said, "that they are exploiting a Sane Fourth. That is an idea which should be boosted, I think. Why, just recall last Fourth in this town, and the many accidents to the children. If I had my way, I would not permit a grain of powder to be handled by untrained children. If fireworks are handled by sensible men for the entertainment of the people, it is a different matter en-

tirely. Still, I believe there are many better ways that a community can use the money for enjoyment for all."

"I think exactly the same as you do, Mr. Stevens, and I never give my children money to squander for fireworks."

"Then you will be pleased to hear of my idea," said Mr. Stevens, eagerly. "I sat thinking over the newspaper article I had read, when Betty came running in to tell her mother that all the Blue Birds must think of something different from a bazaar to make some money for poor children. I talked with her for some time, and as she prattled, a plan took form in my mind. Now, I will lay the matter before you, and you ladies can do the rest.

"Instead of the usual fireworks this year, let the *Chirp* start the campaign for a Sane Fourth. I will get as many men to assist as can be mustered, while you ladies and the Blue Birds ought to do wonders, with the *Chirp* to help you. Your lawns at Mossy Glen are so central and extensive that you might offer them to the town for the celebration. Take, for instance, that tall Norway pine. Let it be rigged up with electric lights and colored globes, and wouldn't it look pretty?

I will see the electric company about doing the work as an advertisement for them. The Blue Birds can visit every tradesman in town to get donations from his stock. Anything will do; shoes, groceries, baking, stationery, clothing, etc. You ladies can call upon the people who live here, but are retired from business, while I will speak to the men who commute to business in the city. I know one of the men who owns stock in the paper-mill up the river. He can send all the paper we will need to wrap up the articles. The twine company over on the Flats can send us twine enough and to spare. Anyone not donating merchandise should give cash to pay expenses for the celebration. If we take some public hall—say the school gym—to hold all the merchandise donated, and there have committees meet to wrap up, price, and arrange, there will be no confusion. All these wrapped gifts can be hung on the tree on the morning of the Fourth, if the day is clear, but no one will know what article is in the paper. Only the price is plainly exposed. Several men should be chosen to attend to the buyers who come to the tree to buy gifts. The profits from this Fourth of July Tree

can be used to bring some more children to the country."

When Mr. Stevens concluded both his hearers were amazed at the prodigious, yet perfectly simple plan.

"Why, your inspiration is wonderful!" exclaimed Mrs. Talmage. "I can see nothing to prevent its being carried out as you stated. I should think every citizen would be eager to help."

"I have your approval, then?" asked Mr. Stevens.

"Indeed you have, and anything else I can give."

"Your lawns and tree?" asked he.

"Not one, but as many as we will need, for I think several trees might answer the need better than one, for so many people crowding about one will cause delay and too much work for the few men at one tree. Say we have one tree for the children, and two or three for adults? It will prove more satisfactory."

"I see I can safely leave my idea in your hands," said Mr. Stevens smilingly. "You and Mrs. Stevens must start to-morow to make the

plan known, as time before the Fourth is limited."

"We need not wait until to-morow; let us begin to-night," said Mrs. Talmage, as she rose and led the way into the library, where she sat down at a long table and motioned her two friends to seats opposite.

"Now, let us jot down every item we can think of, and the copy for Ned to run in the *Chirp*. That will save us much loss of time to-morrow."

It was midnight before the Stevenses left Mrs. Talmage, but all thought the evening well spent. So much so, that Mr. Stevens started for his train filled with the happiness won from thinking of others. It was the first time since he was a boy that he felt as if he was really going to help all the poor children he had such sympathy with. The business men traveling with him noticed the changed expression and asked what good luck made him look so satisfied.

He described the interview with Mrs. Talmage, and asked how many of them would help. He had never asked favors of friends before, and now everyone responded eagerly, for most of the men had children at home, and very few of them approved of fireworks for children.

That same morning Mrs. Talmage had Ike take her and Mrs. Stevens about the town to call upon the Board of Education. They agreed to attend the special meeting that night, and each expressed his individual opinion as favorable to the plan.

That afternoon Mrs. Talmage gathered with the Blue Birds in the Nest and told them all about Mr. Stevens' plan and her visits of the morning. When asked if they would like to coöperate with others in the plan to raise a fund for children, they were almost deafening in their shouts of "yes, yes!"

Ned was sent to his den to set up type for a paper which would tell the pitiable story of the children in the city, and then explain all about the plans for the Fourth of July. The Blue Birds would take the *Chirp* as soon as it was dry, and carry copies to every house and shop in Oakdale.

This was done, and within twenty-four hours after Ned and his friends started to print the extras, everyone was buzzing about full of the novel plan for a Sane Fourth. Very few dissenting voices were heard, and they were soon

hushed by being told they were uncharitable to the city poor children.

All the physicians were enthused, for they knew that city children needed the freedom of country life. The ministers were grateful to think of the children who would be benefited by the moral and spiritual surroundings of their country town; and both professions used every effort to make the celebration a success.

The first of July arrived and found everybody working overtime, or inducing laggards to keep up with the others. At the general meeting held in the school auditorium that same night, Mr. Wells made a valuable suggestion.

"We are succeeding in a very novel plan for a Sane Fourth and it seems possible that a number of children will be able to come out here and enjoy a few weeks of country life. But what of the hordes of children who cannot reach the country, and who will not have any enjoyment on the Fourth? I asked a city newspaper editor to-day if he would start a Whirlwind Fund in the next two days to raise money to bring out an excursion to Oakdale, and he grew enthusiastic over the idea. To-night I spoke to two officials on our railroad, and they will see if the

company will send some cars out gratis to carry the children from the city to the country. I will have a report early in the morning, but I want to see how you feel about this. We will have plenty of fun and to spare for these little ones, and many of the things we buy from the tree will be found to be useless to us, but they can be given to the poor who will find immediate use for everything. The excursion can be sent back toward evening and a Red Letter Day will have come into the lives of these cheerless children."

When Mr. Wells sat down a hum of conversation took place and upon vote, the idea of bringing a train load of children out from the city for the Fourth was approved. So, Mr. Wells telephoned the city editor to run the notice for the Fund, and in the morning it would be known whether or no the special train would be sent gratis.

That meeting adjourned with more work to do than there were individuals to do it, but everyone went at it with an interest which promised great achievement, and so the time flew until the night of the third.

CHAPTER IX

A HAPPY FOURTH

The Blue Birds enlisted every friend and acquaintance to help canvass the town with copies of the *Chirp*. Upon its pages was a program of the Celebration, and a coupon which would admit the bearer. Of course, anyone not holding a coupon would be just as welcome, but Ned said that the coupon would be an inducement to buy the paper.

So busy were Ned, Jinks and Meredith, that they had to ask the help of Simon and Ike when their arms grew too tired to turn the handle of the press. The Blue Birds took as many papers as they could carry and then returned for more when the others were distributed.

The *Chirp* sold for five cents a copy and the revenue from this source was slowly growing, until Mrs. Talmage, who was treasurer, was surprised at the total.

The railroad company had quickly granted the

request for the special train, finding that the city papers were taking up the matter, and would feature the story of the Celebration and excursion of city children. The Oakdale Electric Company also saw a fine chance of publicity through the papers, so they ran wires through the four Christmas trees, and strung hundreds of colored globes in festoons among the trees scattered about the lawn.

Store-keepers donated generously, each vying with the other in having their goods exploited at the festival.

The school-building had been turned over to the committee, and the gymnasium and recreation rooms were to be used by the children who were to spend a few weeks there.

The program assured the people that the patriotic music by the Oakdale Band, the speeches, singing, and pieces spoken by school children would be an event long to be remembered. In fact, so grand did the language of the *Chirp* seem, that the Blue Birds suspected that Ned was not the author of the alluring announcement.

When the night of the third arrived everything that could be done had been attended to,

and as weary children sought their beds, many were the prayers for a clear morrow.

While the country children slept the dreamless sleep of healthy fatigue, the city children tossed and tumbled about for fear that they might not be on time in the morning for the excursion. Many little ones fell asleep only to start up from the awful dream that they stood on the platform just in time to see the wonderful cars leave them behind.

But those were only dreams. The day dawned at last, and expectant city children were hustled about in order to get off on time.

Most of the inhabitants of Oakdale were up early, but about five o'clock a heavy shower came, and many little heads looked dubiously from windows wondering why their prayers were not answered. Within ten minutes from the coming of the shower, however, it stopped raining, and the sun shone through the fleecy clouds, until they vanished, leaving a clear blue sky

People were running about everywhere—errands, trimming the still damp trees, arranging for the refreshments, etc.

Carpenters had erected tables in Mossy Glen woods, and built benches on either side, for the

children to occupy when dinner was announced.

The Oakdale hotel sent immense kettles of broth and huge cans of lemonade, with cups to drink from.

Early in the morning the committee on refreshments began to arrange the long tables. Piles of fruit, sandwiches, and cakes made one think an army was expected.

When the special train was ready at the big station in the city, the eager children, under the direction of the Oakdale committee, got aboard very quickly. Even more children than were expected, or had been arranged for, crowded into the cars.

The ride took forty minutes, not long enough to weary the travelers, but enough to entertain them with the changing scenes of river, meadow and woods. Many of these little ones had never seen the open country before and they looked and looked, spellbound at the lavish way the flowers grew all over the fields. Not one of them would have dared to pluck a daisy or buttercup, for fear some Park policeman would threaten arrest. The reporters from city papers were at the station and so were the photographers. Ned, editor of the *Chirp,* occupied his place with the

city representatives. They asked questions until they had all of the facts about the Blue Birds and the *Chirp,* which would make a most interesting story for their papers.

The special drew into the Oakdale station, stopped, and emptied its load of human freight. A multitude of children of all sorts and conditions swarmed about the platform so happy that they scarcely knew what to do with themselves.

Just as the last one toddled off the car, a brass band started playing, and to the surprise of the committee, the Oakdale Brass Band came marching from the express office and headed the line which was forming to march to Mossy Glen.

It was said that Mr. Starr had engaged the band, and as the long procession marched up the street, everyone cheered mightily. The line of march led past the Grand Army Headquarters, where Old Veterans stood and presented every child with a small American flag. Down through Maple Avenue marched the gay throng, turned into Farragut Place, past Washington Headquarters, where a salute greeted them from a Revolutionary cannon, and finally reached the woods of Mossy Glen, where dinner awaited all.

The Blue Birds had so many things to do from

the moment the procession was heard approaching, that they were the busiest birds that ever flew about. Although they would have scorned to accept the glory of the Celebration, still they felt that they had been the important factor in its conception. So, when, immediately after the refreshments were out of the way, and the Mayor stood up on a table and addressed the crowd, the seven little girls felt very proud to hear him say, "The Blue Bird Organization is a great thing, and we owe this glorious Fourth to the Blue Birds of Happy Times Nest, who first started the idea of bringing the city children to the country. They have been working and saving for weeks to bring one little sick child away from the sweltering heat of the city, and their earnest interest aroused the rest of us, until to-day's achievement is the outgrowth. I want all to join in three cheers for Mother Wings and her seven little Blue Birds."

The "Hip-hip—hooray!" which rang out so wild and loud was heard away off at the gas-works where grimy firemen smiled sympathetically as they thought of the fun all the little strangers were having.

After the speeches the children were per-

mitted to wander about where they willed, until the bell rang for the purchasing of the parcels on the trees.

At three o'clock Mr. Stevens rang a great hand-bell, and everyone hurried over to the place where the tall pine trees stood loaded with packages. The children had one tree all to themselves, hung with toys, games, and various things dear to a child's heart. The young ladies of the town had charge of this tree, and they were kept busy supplying the orders from small purchasers.

As soon as everyone seemed to have come within hearing, Mr. Wells stood upon a box and said, "I have a very interesting distribution to make before the sale begins. The Y. W. C. A. collected a special fund to be distributed among our little guests from the city, and other children who may not have means to buy, so that every child can make his own purchase from the Children's Tree."

The distribution of money then took place and everyone who had no money was given an equal share of the fund. Many a child held for the first time a sum of money which looked a fortune to his poverty-stricken sense.

Then began the sale of the things hanging

upon the trees. Mr. Wells, Mr. Stevens, Mr. Starr, and others were fully occupied. Each had a long pole that had a hook attached to the end, so the packages could be easily unhooked from the branches. The buyers selected whatever gift they liked, and would point it out to the man with a pole. The price would be ascertained, and one of the committee of sales took the money and gave it to Mrs. Talmage, who was cashier.

Many a laugh was heard at the expense of those who secured some article that was particularly inappropriate for his or her use, for no one knew what might be in the package selected.

Mrs. Catlin, seeing a package quite near her, bought it, only to find a dust cap and rubber gloves for kitchen work. As she had plenty of servants to do the work, it was quite a joke to her. Miss Sawyer, a stern maiden lady, hoped to get a lace collar, but upon opening her parcel found a shaving mug and brush, while old Josh Fairfax, a surly bachelor, opened his package to find a dainty lace boudoir cap. Miss Mills, who was noted for her energetic ability to talk found a speaking trumpet in a box which had been sent out by the manufacturer as an advertisement.

Of course, everyone took the fun in good humor, making more sport for the others.

The children enjoyed their tree more than anything that day, every child having enough money to buy a box of candy, besides some toy or useful article.

Many of the gifts purchased by the grown-ups were given to the children to carry home to their parents.

During the rest of the afternoon there was singing by the school children, the speaking of pieces, and a Fourth of July oration by the Mayor of Oakdale. The city children rolled in ecstasy over the soft grass, or picked flowers to carry back to the city. Mr. Wells, Mr. Stevens, Mrs. Talmage, and Mrs. Stevens, went about among the children to ascertain which ones needed the country for a few weeks. These names and addresses were kept by Mrs. Talmage to be looked up more carefully a little later.

The Special was to leave for the city at seven o'clock, but the passengers all had to be there at six forty-five. It was figured that the march back would take about twenty minutes, so the lemonade and cake, which was to be served before the children left, had to be passed around before

six. When the children were called together for the refreshments, the band played the popular airs, and the children sang the ones which they knew. It sounded very fine to hear hundreds of childish voices joining in the chorus, and moved many of the fathers and mothers so much that they renewed their determination to give as many of the little ones as possible a few weeks in the country.

Then the bugle blew for everyone to form in line and march back to the railroad station. The children responded to this order, but with sighs of regret, and a farewell look at the trees, grass and flowers. The music played lively quick-steps, however, and soon the children were keeping time with their feet, and forgot their regrets in present enjoyment. Many of the townsfolk escorted the procession to the train, where hands were waved to the little faces flattened against the window panes, getting a last glimpse of the place where they had had such a fine day.

That evening the committee gathered at the school-house to count over the proceeds of the Celebration.

Mr. Stevens read his report first.

"The special train was given gratis, so the ex-

pense of bringing the children here amounted to twelve dollars for the busses which collected them in the city and took them to the station. The lighting was donated by the electric company, the paper was given by the mills, and the twine by Oakdale Twine Company. The donations of the local stores we all know about. The only cost incurred by the committee is for breakage of dishes loaned by the hotel, and for the help engaged to clear away the débris from the lawns of Mossy Glen."

Mr. Starr, who had charge of the booths where soda and other refreshments were sold during the afternoon, reported a sum of $30.67.

The committee on Trees reported $401 from the sale of the packages.

Mrs. Talmage reported the amount saved from the sale of *Chirps* before the Fourth to be at its last figuring, 2,700 papers at five cents each—about $135.

"But Ned must deduct his cost of paper and ink from that, and not pay for it himself," said Mr. Wells.

"You forget, there were many *Chirps* sold this morning, to visitors, or those who wanted

extra copies. I think this sum will pay for the paper and ink, so we can figure on $135."

"In that case, we have on hand the sum of $766.67, of which about $750 will be clear to care for city children," said Mr. Wells, to the amazement of everyone present.

After congratulations were over, somewhat, Mr. Stevens asked, "How about the cots and bedding? Let us estimate that."

"I sent for some estimates," replied Mr. Starr, "and the best price quoted me was ninety cents each if we ordered fifty to one hundred. Less than fifty would cost us a dollar each. I also received a price on bedding from the Clauson Company, but Mrs. Starr found that the Fresh Air Fund in the city would loan us bedding for a few weeks. We may as well take advantage of this offer and save the cost of bedding to apply toward the maintenance of the children."

The others agreed with Mr. Starr on this point, so it was decided to have Mrs. Starr send for the bedding the next day.

Mrs. Wells had the estimate for food and help, and read as follows: "A matron can be secured for $25 per month. A cook for $30, and two general helpers for $15 each. For six weeks

this will amount to $130. The cost of light, food, and incidentals will be defrayed from the balance on hand."

"After paying for the cots we will have $705 on hand. The help will cost $130, which leaves us $575—now how much will it take to keep each child per week?" asked Mr. Wells.

"The cook mentioned," said Mrs. Talmage, "told me she could prepare good, wholesome food and plenty of it, and could manage to do it at $2.50 per week, for each child."

"Is that all? Why, I don't see how she can do it?" came from several ladies.

"Because she figures on the quantity to cook and all plain food. There will be no desserts, salads or side dishes."

"At that rate it will only cost us $15 a child for six weeks!" exclaimed Mrs. Stevens.

"Yes, but fifty times fifteen is more than we have in the fund to work with," remonstrated Mrs. Wells.

"Then let us pledge to make up the deficit in some way," suggested Mrs. Starr.

"I should propose that we bring out the fifty children as soon as cots and things are here, and if we can't keep them the full six weeks, they

will have to go home a week sooner," said Mrs. Wells.

"Or better still, take fifty children out for three weeks, and then bring fifty more for two or three weeks, so that at least one hundred children will be benefited by an outing," suggested Mrs. Talmage.

The latter plan was considered the best, so it was adopted, and cots were to be immediately ordered for fifty children. If the fund did not last to care for fifty children for the last week, some method was to be used to raise the rest of the money.

The money was turned over to Mr. Stevens, who placed it in the school safe.

Midnight was ringing from the church clock as the tired workers left the building and said good-night to each other.

CHAPTER X

MOTHER WINGS' STORIES

The Blue Birds had been so very busy that no time was found to visit the Ferris children until after the Fourth. They had all gone over the day after the arrival of the children at the farm, but Jamie was lying in a hammock too tired to talk and Alice could speak of nothing else but the chicks, the calf and the kitty which Tess had given her. The kitten was half-squeezed out of shape from so much hugging from Alice, and Ruth tried to explain that little kittens did not like to be hugged so tightly.

By the time the Fourth came, Jamie was so much better that he came over with the Mason family and Alice. He played and enjoyed himself all the afternoon with the other children. Quite often after that he came with Tommy, when fresh eggs had to be delivered at Mossy Glen.

The Blue Birds felt that Jamie and Alice were

their very special charges, while the new ones expected were only partly their children.

Within a few days the cots arrived, the bedding was on its way, and groceries were standing in neat rows on the pantry shelf in the basement, where the cooking was to be done.

The Saturday following the Fourth, everything was in readiness, and the fifty children arrived and were shown each one his or her particular cot. The matron was a kindly woman who was fond of children, and the little ones liked her at once. Not a disagreeable word was said to her during the stay of those fifty grateful children. In fact, the city children felt it was a great privilege to be invited to Oakdale, and were well-behaved and obedient to all their elders.

The families of Oakdale took a great interest in their Fresh Air children, and many a treat came unexpectedly from someone who wanted to give pleasure to the family at the school-house.

Once a week, the city children were invited to spend their afternoon on the lawns of Mossy Glen and be entertained by the Blue Birds and their friends, the Owls. As this was quite a treat for all, it was looked forward to as a picnic.

The first Thursday the gathering took place, the boys and girls from the city felt strange among such lovely surroundings and well-dressed children. Mrs. Talmage felt that something was not in tune, so she called them all over to sit under the great oak tree while she told them a story. Ruth and Ned had heard their mother's stories before, and smiled with delight at the thought of hearing a new one. The other children sat down and waited quietly for the tale to begin. They would decide later whether or not they liked story-telling.

"My story is about some twins who were about the age of most of you children," began Mrs. Talmage, looking about to get the attention of her audience.

"One twin was called Good Nature, and the other, Bad Nature. These children looked so much alike that their own mother could not have told them apart, had it not been for the expression of their faces, which showed their feelings. So, always feeling good and kind, one grew to look sweet and lovely, while the other, always feeling cross and selfish, grew to look ugly and unpleasant.

"The twins grew side by side, each having the

same pleasures and good things, but one was thankful while the other was hateful. Finally, Good Nature was invited to go on a visit, as she was always welcome everywhere; but Bad Nature remained at home, too ugly to open the letter which came at the same time her sister's did.

"During Good Nature's absence, Bad Nature acted worse than ever before, until the mother's heart ached over the perverseness of the child, and the unhappiness she was causing by giving way to her temper.

"One day, Good Nature returned, and her twin seemed a bit pleasanter for a time, but it did not last. The naughtiness came back more than ever, as if to make up for the good spell. The sister, Good Nature, was finally made so unhappy that she was glad to go upon another visit. This time Bad Nature was not invited.

"This went on for a long time; each time Good Nature was at home her sister acted so mean and hateful to her, that at last the mother sent Good Nature away to school. Bad Nature scolded and cried, for she wanted to go, too, but she had not made much use of the lessons at home, so she could not enter the school.

"After several months' absence, Good Nature

came home for a visit. Mother and sister were astonished at her improvement. Her face was so pretty and happy that everyone turned to have a second look at her. She seemed to be always smiling over some good news.

"Bad Nature went to her room and locked the door. She drew up the blinds at the windows and walked over to the mirror to take a look at herself. A face lined with discontent, envy, and malice looked back at her.

" 'Ugh! you nasty thing, how horrible you look. I *hate* you!' she said. As she spoke she scowled at the reflection, and immediately the face opposite grew so repulsive that Bad Nature turned and ran out of the room.

"On the way downstairs she met her sister. Good Nature smiled and asked her where she had been.

"Bad Nature determined to tell her.

" 'I've been in my room hating my face!' she said.

" 'Hating your face! But what for?' asked Good Nature.

" 'Because your face is so lovely, and mine isn't. I wanted to find out what was the matter. Do you know?'

"Good Nature looked very serious as she replied, 'I think I can tell where part of the trouble is, but you may get ugly again if I tell you.'

" 'No, I promise you I won't. I want to look as nice as you do, and I can't see how you do it.'

" 'Then come back to your mirror and I'll show you.'

"The twins ran back to the room and Good Nature placed her sister at such a point that she could look into the mirror without seeing her face reflected there. Good Nature stood directly in front of the glass and smiled. Immediately, Bad Nature saw a smiling, happy reflection in the mirror.

" 'Do you see anything ugly?' asked Good Nature.

" 'Of course not, because that is your face, not mine,' retorted the sister.

" 'No, that is not my *face*—that is but the reflection of my FEELINGS. My face is exactly like yours—we are twins, you know. But it is our *thinking* that makes the difference in our feelings. I try to think of something good and helpful that I can do for everyone, and that makes my feelings happy and full of love for all. These feelings show in the eyes, the smile, the

dimples of the cheek, and the whole expression. After a time, every part of the body acts with the happy way you feel and think, and perfect health is the result. And health is always the best aid for beauty. Sometimes I feel cross and selfish, but I send away those little enemies of health and good looks at once, for, if I allowed them to stay in my thought I would soon look like you do.'

"Bad Nature did not seem offended, so Good Nature continued.

" 'To prove that what I said is true, you look in this mirror again and watch the change of my looks while I try to think mean things, or selfish ways.'

"Good Nature tried very hard to feel and think as she said, but she had grown to be as lovely as she thought and felt, and it was hard work to twist her thoughts into ugly ways. However, after several minutes of trying to think ugly, mean things about everyone she knew, her sister saw the light and happiness gradually go out of her face and a sullen, gray expression come over it.

" 'Don't, don't!' exclaimed Bad Nature, as she feared that ugly look on her sister's face.

"Good Nature laughed happily when she heard

how her sister detested the look. Then Bad Nature stepped beside her twin, and said, 'Just let me try hard and see if I can look nice.'

"Good Nature took her hand. 'Now close your eyes until I tell you to look. Now, think and think ever so hard, of everything you have to be grateful for. Think of all the nice things you have, of the love of mother and friends, of all the good that has ever come into your life.'

"Presently as Bad Nature followed her sister's advice and thought of everything kind and good, a corresponding expression of good, kind feeling crept over the face which had been marred by ugly lines. As the sweet look grew, Good Nature called her to open her eyes, and look.

"There, sure enough, were two faces reflected in the mirror so nearly alike that one could hardly tell which was Good or which was Bad Nature.

" 'Doesn't that prove it?' cried Good Nature laughing as her twin smiled happily back at the reflected face.

" 'But it is awfully hard always to feel good toward others,' said Bad Nature—not Bad anymore, but turning Good.

" 'It is awfully hard to always *think* good for

oneself,—the feeling good to others will come by itself. The work you have to do is with yourself, and that is all in thinking good. After you get into the habit, it is quite easy, and then your face will always stay pleasant.'

" 'Then I will begin right away to grow your kind of a face,' returned the twin sister.

"During the time that Good Nature was at home, her sister tried, and tried, to think good all of the time, and soon it was hard for the mother to tell one from the other. So, one day, she called the twins to her room and said, 'I have such trouble to know one from the other, that I have decided to change your names. There really isn't any little girl to call Bad Nature, and both can't be called Good Nature, so I shall call Good Nature, Think Right, after this, and the twin who used to be Bad Nature, shall be called Feel Right.' "

When Mrs. Talmage stopped talking the children sighed, and many called out, "Oh, do tell us some more stories!"

"I shall have to stop to think up another one," she said, with a kindly smile.

The children all started to ask questions about Think Right, which the Blue Birds tried to an-

swer, for they had heard many similar stories from their Mother Wings.

While Mrs. Talmage sat with her hands covering her eyes, trying to make up another story, a little girl, who sat out on the end of the circle, jumped up crying, and vigorously shook her skirts.

"What's the matter?" cried several children.

"Oh, oh, there's heaps of bugs in that hill of sand!"

The city children crowded about to watch the little ants swarming over the big heap of sand.

"Those are ants, dearies, and they won't hurt you. That is their hotel where they all live together. It is called an Ant Hill," said Mrs. Talmage, so quietly, that the fears of the children were allayed.

The children watched the ants with lively curiosity for a time, then Mrs. Talmage said, "I think I will tell you a story about some ants."

Without a second call, everyone dropped to the grass and waited to hear the story.

"The name of this is 'The Hotel of the Ants,' " said Mrs. Talmage, while the children giggled at the funny name.

"One summer, several colonies of ants decided

to spend the season at a smart seashore resort. As all ants are social, never living alone, but in large families in a colony, there was always plenty of fun going on. Such a thing as a selfish ant was never heard of in Ant Town, and should an ant have a peevish look the others immediately doctored it with ant tonic until happiness and contentment reigned again.

"Well, a meeting of ants was called; every colony was to select a member to represent it at the convention which was to choose a resort which would please everyone. The Mason Ants chose Turf Ant, and although he was the commonest order of the specie, he represented the largest number. The Hill Ants selected one called Wood Ant, so called for living in, or near, trees and forests. The Carpenter Ants chose Jet Ant to represent them, for his coat was so black and shiny no one would ever mistake him for anything else than a Carpenter Ant. Then, there were some Foreign Ants visiting America, and they decided upon Yellow Ant, Green Ant, Sugar Ant, and Black Ant, to act as their ambassadors. There were the White Ants, who were late at the convention, on account of their tropical habits, and they hurriedly called upon

Termite, their namesake, to look after their interests in the matter.

"Now, these ants, Turf, Wood, Jet, Foreign and Tropical, packed their bags and started for a resort called 'The Hotel of Ants,' which had been recommended by an insect known sometimes as Water Ant, but which really was not an ant, but more like a fly. So the travelers started from the cross-roads where the meeting had been held, and crawled toward a field of grain which hid the open country from the eyes of ants.

"They reached the border of the field and there saw a large grasshopper watching their procession.

" 'Good Ants,' said he, 'where are you all going?'

"Turf Ant, the leader replied, 'To cross this immense field and seek a summer resort on the other side.'

" 'Ha! in that case, I can assist you. Just climb upon my back and I will give you a lift along the road.'

"The ants climbed up and clung fast to his back.

"The queer conveyance went hoppity, hop, hop, hop, as he sprang high into the air and landed

upon a hummick, shaking the ants up well, before he hopped again. The next leap landed him on the side of a wheat-head which swayed back and forth with the weight and would have thrown the ants to the ground, had they not held fast to the scaly back of the grasshopper. Scores of other hops followed the first few, until the stalks of wheat grew thinner and scattered, and finally the edge of the field was seen, where the ants had never before visited.

"Here, the polite grasshopper squatted down upon his long, springy legs and permitted the ants to crawl off his back.

" 'If you return to-night, I will carry you back as I wish to spend the day with some friends on this side of the field. But do not make it too late, friends, as I never care to be seen after sundown. You know, there are too many owls and other birds of prey waiting about for a juicy morsel of food like me.'

"The ants nodded understandingly, and promised to be at the place appointed long before sundown. The grasshopper knew the reputation of ants for promptness, and had no fear of their being late.

"The ants looked about and walked around,

but could not see anything that looked like a large hotel. Some Sand Fleas had been watching the antics of the ants, however, and when they saw that the ants knew not which way to go, they came over and kindly offered their services.

"The ants knew that Sand Fleas were ostracized by good insect society, as they were salt water bugs who had nothing in common with vegetarians or wood bugs. But the Sand Fleas seemed kind and eager to help them out of their trouble, so the ants decided to tell them what they sought.

" 'The Hotel of Ants? Oh, yes, we know just where it is,' replied the leader of Sand Fleas, when he heard where the ants wanted to go. He motioned to the other fleas to come up, and then turned to the ants again, saying, 'It is some way from here, and the sand along the seashore is wet this morning, so we will carry you over if you will get upon our backs.'

"The ants each had a Sand Flea for a steed, and soon the journey was over, for the Hotel of Ants reared its great sandy top before them. Here the obliging fleas said they would wait until they heard the news—whether the visitors would

remain a day or two, or return at once. In the latter case, the fleas would carry them back to the field.

"The proud Big Ant who owned the hotel met the visitors with a low bow, but, seeing the Sand Fleas waiting out on the sand, his lip curled with scorn.

" 'Send those common hacks away, and I will have you taken back on the Dead Leaf Trolley Road which was blown down here last night, and will leave on the next puff of wind.'

"But the wise ants from the colonies knew a friend when they met one, and the Turf Ant replied, 'Most gracious landlord, we have heard all kinds of slander about Sand Fleas, but we have not seen anything wrong. They are humble and homely insects, but seem to have more desire to help others than most folks have, so we will not listen to opinion, but take them at their real worth.'

"The hotel keeper said nothing for he was anxious to get such a large colony of boarders, but he turned his back on the Sand Fleas, and led the ants through winding corridors, in and out, until they were quite uncertain as to the way out again.

"The rooms were engaged and they arranged to arrive the next day, if possible.

"Upon reaching the front door again, there sat the patient Sand Fleas waiting to carry them back.

"As the ants climbed up on the backs of the fleas, the Proud Ant smiled disdainfully at such common ways. But Turf Ant called to him, and said, 'Pride goeth before a fall, but we are not too proud to accept the helping hand of a friend no matter how lowly or mean the world judges him.'

"This compliment pleased the Sand Fleas greatly, and they hurried away with the ants to the meadow where the grasshopper sat waiting for his passengers.

"A pleasant 'good-day' was said to the fleas and away hopped the grasshopper until he reached the place in the cross-roads where he left the ants. The ants told him that they had taken rooms at the Hotel of Ants, so the grasshopper promised to see all of his friends that night and tell them to come around early in the morning, so there would be enough steeds to carry the ants and their baggage across the field.

"That evening, every ant was busy packing his

effects so as to be ready to leave Sand Hill Resort at daybreak."

A pause occurred here, while Mrs. Talmage watched Ike and Simon help Katy bring out refreshments. She turned to the children and said, "Dearies, I think we will have to leave the ants *en route* for the seashore, for I must see about the cake and ice cream, now."

Although ice cream and cake sounded mighty good to the children, they would far rather have had the rest of the ant story than refreshments, just then. And one boy said, "You won't forget what happened to the ants, will you?"

"Oh, no indeed! Some day when it rains, we will follow them and see what they did," said Mrs. Talmage.

Immediately, several children looked up at the sky to see if there were any clouds visible, and Mrs. Talmage, seeing the movement, laughed quietly as her back was turned to serve the cream.

CHAPTER XI

THE BLUE BIRDS' COOKIE LESSON

The people of Oakdale outdid themselves to entertain the city children during their stay in the country, so the Blue Birds were not so occupied with their entertainment as they thought they would be. Several of the families having large country places about Oakdale invited the children to spend the day; sometimes it was a picnic, another, a ball match, or just a few hours in the woods playing games and gathering flowers.

The little Ferris children were included in all of these fêtes, as some of the children they knew were among the group staying at the school-house.

The day following the story-telling at Mossy Glen was very warm and clear, so Mrs. Starr sent Jim down to the school-house early in the morning to invite the city visitors to spend the day in the woods at Oakwood, her country home.

The Mason and Ferris children were also invited, but the Blue Birds preferred to attend their regular Nest meeting, as there had been none during all the excitement since the Fourth of July.

They met as usual at ten o'clock, and were delighted to hear Mrs. Talmage plan to have a baking lesson that morning.

"Oh! but aren't we too young?" asked Norma.

"Mother never lets me bake because she says I waste more than she can buy," added Edith.

"Well, we must be careful not to waste anything that is good; that is part of good housekeeping, you know," replied Mrs. Talmage, as the children preceded her down the steps from the Nest.

Evidently, Lizzie, the cook, had been told of the Blue Birds' plan to have a baking-day, for she was not to be seen in the kitchen or pantry, but everything was cleaned up and pans, spoons, dishes, and rolling pin, were placed upon the long marble-topped baking table.

The children trembled with eagerness to begin, so Mrs. Talmage soon had them busy measuring out milk, sugar, flour, and butter, or beating eggs. When each division of the work had been completed Mrs. Talmage took the dish and

kneaded the dough-like cake-batter. After a little time it was turned out on to the flour-sifted table. Then Mrs. Talmage cut it into seven little sections.

"Now each one of you must take one of these lumps and roll the dough out thin—about an eighth of an inch thick. When that is done, you can cut out any shaped cake you like—stars, diamonds, circles, or anything; but the smaller they are, the quicker they will bake. I will grease seven pans for you, and as you cut a cookie out, it should be placed in the pan. Lay them in rows so there will be enough room in the pan for what you have."

"Oh, Mother Wings, may I cut out a bird?" cried Ruth.

"Certainly; and if you should make a blue bird, I will try to make some icing which will make blue-tipped feathers," laughed Mrs. Talmage.

"Oh, can you make blue icing? What is it made from?" asked several children.

"Icing is made from the beaten whites of eggs and stiffened with powdered sugar. Then, there are prepared icing sugars which are colored with

vegetable colors, and other things, to use for fancy cakes."

"If Fluff makes a blue bird, I should like to make some robin redbreasts," said Betty, eagerly.

"All right, I will see if Lizzie has any colored sugar icings in the store-room. If not, I must make some blue sugar by taking some of the juice from a can of blueberries. That makes a lovely blue bird color."

"I should like to bake a big owl and give it to Ned," said Dot, who had preferred to attend the Blue Bird meeting rather than stay at home for the picnic.

"What kind of a bird can I make to be able to get the colored icing for its feathers?" asked Norma, giving voice to the question the other little girls thought of.

"Well, I can easily mix brown by using cinnamon; I can make yellow, by using egg powder, which is a coloring many bakers use instead of real eggs. I keep some in the store-room to color any fancy dish, like this icing for instance. Then there is green, which is made from spinach. Lizzie tried to make some bright green from mint, but it was unsuccessful. She has some

made from pistachio nuts, however, but the spinach green is the best color for you to-day."

"Well, I'll make a yellow canary," said Norma.

"And I'll make a sparrow with brown icing," said Edith.

"I'll choose an oriole and take some red and some white and some brown," May said.

"But Mrs. Talmage didn't say she could make red for my redbreast," cried Betty, anxiously.

"Oh, yes, that is simple. We use beet-juice for our red, but a great many people use cochineal—most of the caterers use that; I do not like the idea, although they say it is harmless."

"Goodness! cochineals are little insects, aren't they?" asked Dot, who had heard her older sister talking about them.

"Yes, and they are used for making crimson dyes, but I would rather not eat them in my icings," laughed Mrs. Talmage.

"I've been trying to find a bird that has green feathers, but I can't," complained Frances.

"Why, goosie! What's the matter with a polly? She has green," retorted her sister.

"Oh, oh, that's so! I can make a great big poll with a yellow beak, red top-knot, and green feathers," cried Frances.

"Yes, you're all fixed up but me. Mrs. Talmage hasn't told me anything to make gray feathers with. Unless I use coal-dust. Is that poison?" asked Dot, seriously.

Everyone laughed at Dot's idea of mixing coal-dust in her cake icing, and Mrs. Talmage replied, "We might use burnt caramel. That is made of sugar burnt almost black, and it is extensively used by bakers and other food-manufacturers. Almost every vanilla extract maker colors his liquid with caramel fluid, as it is called."

"Then I'll use caramel fluid—I like that name, it sounds a lot like candy," said Dot, eagerly.

So the birds were started and not a word was heard for a long time—at least it was a long time for seven little girls. While they rolled and cut out their different birds, Mrs. Talmage mixed the coloring into each icing selected. Mrs. Talmage showed them how to use the tiny cake-cutters deftly, and there was great excitement as the dough began to take on the shapes of birds.

Suddenly Dot's knife slipped and lopped off the owl's ear. "Oh, my goodness! there goes his ear!" she cried.

"My, that's too bad," condoled Norma, coming over.

"What can she do, mother?" asked Ruth, anxiously.

"Just pinch it back on the dough-head. It may flatten out that side a little, but Dot can mold it into shape again like the other ear," replied Mrs. Talmage, showing the children how to mend a dough-owl's head.

They all laughed at the accident, and Ruth added, "Nobody would mind having their legs or arms broken, or chopped off, if they could be mended as easy as the owl's head."

"But the doctors wouldn't have much to do," said Dot.

"And we wouldn't be so afraid of getting hurt, either," added Betty, wisely.

"Oh, couldn't we have heaps of fun if we weren't afraid of falling out of trees, or getting mashed flat under an automobile," sighed Norma.

"Yes, Blue Birds, fear is the great 'bogie man' of our lives. We fear something is going to happen to ourselves or someone we love; we fear things that have happened and *might* happen again. What a lovely world this would be if fear was destroyed," sighed Mrs. Talmage.

"Oh! There goes Robin Redbreast's leg. I was so busy listening, I forgot where the leg

ought to be and I just cut him without any," laughed Betty.

"Stick a strip of dough in his side and operate like I did," advised Dot.

The children soon had the pans partly filled with the cookie birds, but the owl and polly were so large and important, that Dot and Frances had to complete the molding of the head and feet after they were in their respective pans. The poll had a most wonderful beak, and the owl, with such large ears, could have heard everything for miles around if it were alive.

The cookies were then ready to be baked. The oven was hot, and Mrs. Talmage shoved one pan after the other into its dark interior, while the children hovered anxiously about the door.

"We must watch now, for about eight to ten minutes," said Mrs. Talmage, as the children formed a circle about her.

Every few minutes the oven-door was opened and the pans turned about so all the birds would bake alike. Every time the door was opened, an odor of delicious cake met the nostrils of the little bakers, and they "ah'd" with delight.

When, at last, some of the small birds were baked, the children crowded about to watch

them turned out on the table. "I think Dot's owl is insulted because we made fun of his ear, and he thinks he will worry us by not browning as soon as the others," laughed Mrs. Talmage, after all the cakes were out excepting the owl.

"If he smells as good as these, I'm afraid Ned won't see his owl," laughed Dot.

In a few moments more, however, Mr. Owl was brought out, and he certainly did look nice and brown. There was only one defect in his appearance, and that made every Blue Bird laugh. The ear which had been mended bulged up in the point and had a deep dent where Dot had pinched the head with her fingers. The other ear looked all right, but the old owl had a very unwise appearance with his deformed head. Dot stood looking at him for several minutes, then clapped her hands madly.

"Dot has very wonderful idea," laughed Ruth.

Dot did not stop to reply, however, for she ran from the room and was gone a few minutes. She came back, holding something behind her, and asked the others not to watch what she did.

A few seconds of silence, while the girls stood

with backs turned to Dot, then she cried, "Now you may look at my owl!"

The Blue Birds laughed indeed, when they saw what Dot had done. She found a lead-pencil on the library table, and in the dent made by the pinched-in ear, she stuck the pencil. It made the owl look as if the quill was stuck behind his ear.

The cakes by this time were cool enough to be iced; so each child took her colored icing, and started to make feathers. It was sticky work, and half the feathers would run one into the other, but at last the birds were clothed, and set away to allow the icing to harden. There was considerable icing left over, and as Dot licked her fingers, she exclaimed, "Umph! This is good! Eat it up, girls."

The other children tasted it, and soon all evidence of feathers disappeared.

"How long will it be before the birds will be ready?" asked Norma.

"If you leave them in the cool pantry for an hour, or more, it will be best," replied Mrs. Talmage; so the Blue Birds wondered what to do meantime.

"We have had our pleasure, so now we ought

to clear away all evidence of it," ventured Mrs. Talmage.

"And wash dishes, too?" asked Dot.

"Yes, leave the kitchen just as we found it. That is a part of a Blue Bird's work—to keep things tidy."

"All right, I just love to splash dish water, but Mumzie won't let me at home," said Dot, looking about for a dish-pan.

"But we won't splash to-day—we will only wash them," laughed Mrs. Talmage, as she took the pan down from its peg and placed it in the porcelain sink for Dot.

The other Blue Birds cleaned off the marble slab where the dough had hardened, scraped up the icing bowls, and stood ready with towels to wipe the dishes as Dot washed them. In a short time the kitchen looked as neat as it did when the Blue Birds came in, and Lizzie felt very proud of their thoughtfulness.

As the children filed across the lawn, Dot asked, "What shall we do to-morrow?"

"Why do you ask?" questioned Ruth.

"Because the minute I get home, Don wants to know what we did and what we expect to do," replied Dot.

"I guess poor Don would like to belong, wouldn't he?"

"Yes, he is awful sorry the Headquarters won't have boys," said Dot, regretfully, for she liked to have her twin about.

"I told Ned to start an Owl club for boys, because he knows several boys who would join," said Ruth.

"I'm sure Mete and Jinks would belong," ventured Dot.

"I think I'll make a note of that idea and see what we can do for the boys," replied Mrs. Talmage, taking a paper and pencil from her chatelaine.

"Oh, that reminds me!" cried Dot, running to her hat and taking a letter from its lining.

"Mother said to give you this, but I forgot!" admitted Dot.

"Well, I'm glad you recalled it in time," smiled Mrs. Talmage, after she had read the letter. "Mrs. Starr tells me that Mr. Wells is going to repeat the motion-pictures at the school for the benefit of the city children, and some new films will be shown. If we are going out tonight, I think we ought to adjourn for the afternoon to rest."

"But we may take the cookie birds, mayn't we?" asked the eager children.

"Oh, certainly; they might fly away if you leave them here," laughed Mrs. Talmage, and sent the Blue Birds to the kitchen to ask Lizzie for their baking.

As the Blue Birds came out carefully carrying the prize birds, there was no complaint about going right home, for they were most eager to show their own baking.

The motion-pictures proved a great success, for the city children felt that they were being taken straight up to the clouds, and many little screams and gasps were heard when the air-ship came near bumping into Mars.

All that night, the gentle patter, patter, of rain made no heartache in the breasts of the little ones, for they had something to look forward to on the first rainy day.

The rain continued in the morning, so Mrs. Talmage sent word to the matron that she would call and finish her story to the children.

At ten o'clock a closed motor car stopped in front of the school and seven little girls raced up the steps, followed by Mrs. Talmage.

The city children sat in the recreation room waiting, and when they saw their story-teller coming through the door, they gave her a noisy welcome.

Mrs. Talmage laid aside her raincoat and said, "Let me see, we left the Ants packing their trunks, didn't we?"

"Did they have trunks?" asked one little tot earnestly.

"I think they had tiny seed pods that answered for trunks," replied Mrs. Talmage.

The other children laughed at question and answer, but Mrs. Talmage continued her story without further interruption.

"The colonists started away from the old hill by the roadside, and walked until they reached the fence where the big grasshopper had his friends waiting. As many ants as could, would crowd upon one grasshopper's back, and away he would go. Soon, a procession of ant-laden grasshoppers crossed the great meadow, and oh! what a feast they would have made for some duck or goose. But, fortunately for the ants and grasshoppers, ducks and geese very seldom walked that way.

"Reaching the end of the meadow, the grasshoppers sat down until their passengers got off. The ant leaders then thanked their steeds over and over, for they had been saved a great deal of walking and time by the lift given them by the grasshoppers.

"The ant multitude then continued on their way, wondering if they must crawl all the distance between the meadow and the hotel. But soon they saw the Sand Fleas hopping up from the ocean's edge and come hurrying forward to meet them.

" 'We did not expect you so early in the morning, but we have arranged to have you embark in a boat which we will sail to the hotel—bag and baggage.'

"The Leaders were immediately questioned by the other ants as to who their friends were. And they replied, 'They are common fleas that live a vagrant life on the seashores, but they are not vicious in habits, like dog fleas, and they are much cleaner, for they bathe so frequently during the day.'

"So the ants quieted any further scruples and accepted the offer of the boats, which were hollow-shaped leaves which had curled up on the

edges, and were quite light and dry. The ants crawled in and waited for the tide to rise. Soon it crept up and floated the leaves. Each wave that washed in carried the boats along and up the shore, for the current ran obliquely from the starting place. The boats were guided by the Sand Fleas, who seemed not to mind the water. Finally, a great wave threw the boats far up on the beach, and the fleas called: 'All out! here you are!' and the ants who had not already been thrown out by the shock of upsetting the boat, scrambled out of the leaves.

"The Sand Fleas then started to go up the beach toward the great hill known as the Hotel of Ants. But the traveler ants could not crawl on the wet beach, but stood still in fear and trembling that another wave might drown all of them.

"The fleas had quite overlooked the fact that ants do not like water, and will go a great distance out of their way to avoid moisture. But the moment they saw the difficulty, they hurried back and carried the ants and all their luggage up to the dry beach.

"After many mishaps the ants arrived at the hotel, and were soon settled in their rooms.

But that was only the beginning of their troubles.

"Their rooms were not light and airy like the ones they had at home; the beds were hard and not clean like theirs at home. The rooms were small and many had to occupy the same one, while at home everyone had a room of his own. The corridors were so narrow and dark that most of the ants crawled about for hours looking for the dining-room. Those who were late did not get any supper, and those who found the dining-room in time, were surprised at the scanty amount of food served.

"As they met on the terrace after supper to talk things over, the Carpenter Ants said, 'We feel quite homesick without our trees about us.'

"And the Wood Ants added, 'Or some gate-posts or old log; what shall we do here to be comfortable'?

"And the Mason Ants declared, 'We have never had to live like this. At home we have a cozy stone, or find shelter in some concrete walk.'

"Then the Foreign and Tropical Ants, who had been listening to the complaints of their brethren, said, 'Why do we stay here? The Proud Ant who owns this hotel is not as nice as he might be, and he certainly is only thinking

of making money out of his summer boarders and not of giving them anything in return. We will be pleased to leave whenever you say so. In America you do things differently, but abroad no one would think of paying such high prices unless they got their money's worth.'

"The more they thought it over, the more inclined were the ants to go home. They said, 'How foolish folks are to run away from friends and every comfort, just to stay at a resort that is the fashion, and because other foolish folks go there.'

"They had decided to leave the next morning, and were about to go into the hotel, when a number of Sand Fleas ran up, crying, 'Ants! Oh, Ants from the roadsides, run away, for a big storm is coming in and the wind is blowing the waves high enough to wash away this hotel. You see it is not concrete or stone, so is not storm-proof. Like so many summer resorts, the proprietor put it up cheaply and as quickly as possible to make all the money he could.'

"Big Proud Ant heard these remarks and started to sting the Sand Fleas, but they hopped away laughing at his threats. The ants realized, however, that the Sand Fleas spoke the truth,

for they had examined the mason work of the ant-hill and saw it was very flimsy.

"The ants hurried after the Sand Fleas, who led them up on a steep bank where waves would not splash. Here they cowered under the board walk all during that dreadful night when the wind blew a gale, and the waves washed so high that they almost sent the spray into their very faces. It was so dark, except for the flashes of lightning, that they did not know how the hotel withstood the waves; but in the morning, after the storm had passed, and the sun came out, they found that the hotel, and all of its vast grounds, had been washed away—the beach was as smooth as a floor.

"The Sand Fleas had waited about during the night, and now made their appearance from the little holes they had burrowed into. The ants were so grateful for saving their lives, that they had White Ant—who spoke several languages—make a speech of thanks.

"Then the fleas offered to show the poor forlorn ants a short-cut to the meadow, and they started with higher spirits than one would think after losing all their baggage in the hotel.

"The short-cut was beset by many dangers, not the least of them being the gigantic feet of those terrible beings called mortals. Many and many a time did the ants have to scurry out of the walk to avoid being crushed to death by these big things.

"After a long, tiresome walk, however, the ants reached the meadow, and bade the Sand Fleas good-by.

"No obliging grasshoppers were there to carry them over that vast stretch of field, for the grasshoppers thought the ants were enjoying a fine time digging in the seashore sand, or making pies in the warm sun. Great was their surprise, therefore, when they saw the long procession of ants wind past their favorite patch of wheat, minus hats, baggage, and other property.

"They called out to know what was wrong, and White Ant replied, 'Vanity! All was vanity! Never again will we follow the doings of others, just to impress someone with our importance. But we will be sensible and do our duty wherever we find it, and so really *be* somebody.' "

CHAPTER XII

THE BIRDS AND BLOSSOMS FÊTE

The visit of the little city children passed away quickly, until the end of their second week. Then the elders who had planned to bring out fifty more children for the last three weeks of vacation-time, began to talk about raising the balance of the required fund.

Mrs. Talmage talked it over with the Blue Birds one morning, saying, "We hadn't much to do with raising the fund which resulted from the Fourth of July Tree, but I have a new idea that seems easy to work out, and the Blue Birds will be the leading feature in it."

"Oh, do tell us what it is!" exclaimed the children.

"Well, as you know, next week will be the last one of these city children's visit, and I thought they ought to have a good send-off that they would always remember. Of course, being summer, the only pleasant place to hold a party is out-of-doors. Simon and Ike said that they did

not mind clearing away the débris after we had the Trees on the lawn, especially as the results were so satisfactory. I asked them if it would be injurious to the grass to have another large gathering on the lawn, or did they consider I was asking too much from them. They both laughed at the idea, and said they never had enough to do to keep out of mischief. I said 'I guess I'll keep you busy then, for the next few weeks.' Last night I had Ned and Fluff write down some plans and now we will see what you think of them."

The Blue Birds sat about Mrs. Talmage in the Nest up among the cherry-tree branches, and were most eager to hear all about the new entertainment for the fund.

"Ned selected the name as most appropriate, but, of course, if anyone here thinks of a better one, we will gladly change this. At present, it is called, 'Birds and Blossoms Fête.' "

"Oh, that is lovely," whispered several voices, and Mrs. Talmage continued: "Of course we will be the Blue Birds, while Ned and his friends will be the Owls. All other children can select birds or blossoms, and have groups of them. The only kind of birds one ever sees in the city is the

English sparrow, so I thought it would be cute to have the visitors choose sparrows."

"Oh, but mother!" exclaimed Ruth, "I never thought until this very moment—maybe the poor little dears would love to have gay feathers like orioles or canaries, and just because they never see any in the dreary city streets, makes it all the more reason why they would like lovely flowers or bright colored birds."

"Yes, Fluff, you are right!" said Mrs. Talmage, after thinking the idea over. "Many of the children may prefer to be daisies, or robin redbreasts, so we will leave it for them to choose."

"Now, one thing we must guard against is, that not too many join one group. The more variety the better for the beauty of the fête. I think we have a right number in our Blue Bird Nest, and I should say from five to seven would be about right for other birds, or flowers."

"There goes Ned—let's call him over!" cried Dot, who spied Ned leaving the house and running toward the barns.

Ruth placed her hands to her mouth like a tube and called to her brother. Ned heard, and changed his course to come over to the Nest.

"Got any news for the *Chirp?*" he asked, as he came up the steps.

"We are just deciding about the fête, but you might wait here and hear the rest of the plan. We have put you down for the Owl group, and you can see Mete, Jinks, Don, and anyone you like. We have settled on not having more than seven, and not less than five, in each group," explained Mrs. Talmage.

Ned made a memorandum of these points, and asked, "When will this take place?"

"Well, if we decided now, we would have more time to plan. And we want to have these city children enjoy it, so it would have to be held some time next week," replied Mrs. Talmage.

"Whew!" whistled Ned, "then I'll have to get out an 'Extra,' won't I?"

"All joking aside, I think that will be the best way to circulate the news quickly. An extra *Chirp* to hand about to every house, will soon tell everyone what is planned. We will have plenty of help to carry papers, for the fifty children will enjoy helping us," said Mrs. Talmage.

"The youngsters from the city are going home next week on Saturday afternoon, so you had

better have the fête about Thursday of next week," advised Ned.

"That will do, I think, and now let us think of what to say in the paper," suggested Mrs. Talmage.

The children sat thinking hard, with foreheads puckered, trying to form a good reading notice for the *Chirp*. "How's this," said Ned, after several minutes. "The last week of the city children's vacation is near at hand, and the Blue Birds have decided to give them a farewell party. At the same time a fund will be raised to help the second battalion. The fête will be celebrated on Mossy Glen lawns, Thursday, July 25, at 3 P. M. All children in costume may enter free, all adults and other children may secure tickets at the school-house from the matron, or from any of the Blue Birds."

The girls praised this fine notice, but Mrs. Talmage said, "You ought to state the price of admission."

"I will, but you did not tell me how much it would be."

That was another matter to talk over, but it was finally decided to charge five cents for children, and ten for adults.

"All right for that. Now, anything else?" said Ned.

"Yes, you must set that up in catchy headlines, so it will be easily read. If you want us to help you with printing, or cutting paper, just say so, as we have nothing in particular to do just now," said Mrs. Talmage.

"I think there'll be lots of things you can do, while I set up the type. If you wish, mother, you may select the type you want, while I set it up," replied Ned.

"I can set type—I used to play with Jinks' box last winter," said Dot, eager to handle the queer little letters.

"Oh, if I need any help, Fluff can do it, because she can spell better than you," responded Ned, forgetting for the moment that Dot might feel offended at her implied ignorance in spelling.

"I just guess I can spell as good as Fluff, now then! I used to spell every girl down in our matches, didn't I, Fluff?" cried Dot, her chin quivering.

"Yes, Ned, she does, and even if we can't spell the big words, you'll have it written out, so all we will have to do is to copy it," replied Ruth.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, Dot, I forgot what grade you were in in school, and only thought of your age," said Ned, trying to make amends.

Mrs. Talmage had gone ahead, and did not hear the talk between Ned and Dot, but after the Blue Birds arrived at Ned's den Dot was detailed for type work, and the dimples came back to her little round face.

Mrs. Talmage was at the telephone, calling up Mrs. Starr at Oakwood, Mrs. Catlin at Top Notch, Mrs. Stevens at Pine Tree Bungalow, and Mrs. Wells in the big house back of the school. The matron in charge of the children was also told some of the plans for the fête, and all were asked to help in every way they could.

As soon as the telephoning was over, Mrs. Talmage sorted the type and selected the size she thought they ought to use, and Ruth and Dot were soon at work setting it up, a line at a time. Norma, Betty and Frances were shown how to cut the sheets of paper to the right size.

For an hour busy hands were at work, and Mrs. Talmage inspected the type set up by Dot and Ruth. Here and there she had to smile, as she found a great large letter in the center of a

word, and where a large letter ought to be, a tiny one. But this was soon rectified, and Ned took the form and locked it together. The press was started and papers run off rapidly; when Ned's arm grew tired of turning the handle, the Blue Birds each took a turn.

By noon several hundred papers had been printed and the ink was drying. The schoolhouse had been named as the meeting place for the children who volunteered to distribute the notices, so Ike and Simon carried the papers there.

All afternoon Ned and the Blue Birds ran off the notices, taking turns at the handle, or in feeding, and pulling off papers after they were printed.

Before night almost every house had received a notice of the fête, and as most homes had children, it was an exciting surprise, for a costume fête sounded like a grown-up masquerade.

The ladies brought their husbands to the committee meeting that night, held at the schoolhouse, and details were decided upon. It was a question whether to have any refreshments, but all children like a party better where there

is cake and ice-cream, and the men offered to attend to that part of the entertainment, if the ladies would see about providing the city children with the material for their costumes.

For the next few days, a visitor in Oakdale would surely have thought that everyone was engaged in the crêpe paper business, as snips of paper of every hue fluttered from house verandas, or lay scattered about lawns.

Then came the day of the fête, clear and bright.

Ike had gone in the automobile for his sister and her children, and Jamie and Alice Ferris. Jamie had grown so rosy and strong that no one would have believed him to be the same child the Blue Birds brought from the city.

As the children in gay costumes were expected to bring all the coloring, not a flag, or bit of bunting, was to be seen at Mossy Glen; but several impromptu tables had been erected under the great oak tree where the cakes and ice-cream were to be served.

Guests began to arrive for an hour before the time set, while Mr. Wells and Mr. Stevens stood at either stone gateway to collect tickets, or money. Ike and Simon were stationed at the

side and rear gates, in case anyone came by the side roads.

At three everyone in the town seemed to be present, so Mrs. Talmage stood upon a box to call order. Everyone grouped themselves about, and waited for further suggestions.

The Blue Birds were dressed in gray and blue costumes made of crêpe paper and cut in sheaf-like pieces of different lengths; they were sewed on a belt, one feather overlapping the other, until the top ones were reached and these were short. Their sleeves looked like wings, with the backs wired to fly up and down, and upon their heads were little crests of blue-tipped paper feathers. Mrs. Talmage wore a grayish-blue changeable silk dress with a girdle of blue and a cap of blue paper feathers like her Blue Birds wore.

Ned and his chums made fine owls, with paper feather suits of dull gray tipped with white, and shaded with black. Upon their heads were close-fitting bonnets of netting with short gray feathers pasted over it, and two erect ears standing out from either side of the top. Two huge pieces of court-plaster had been cut out with a hole in the center of each where the eyes could look through. All around this hole, moistened

and fastened upon the sticky plaster, were white feathers. The plaster was then stuck to cheeks, eyebrows and nose, and made the owls look very wise, indeed. Hollow beaks of pasteboard were fastened over their noses, and tied with black elastic about the head.

Lavinia Starr and her friends represented Crimson Roses, and very beautiful they looked, each with a green cap dress of red petals, and green stockings and shoes.

Other children selected flowers or birds according to their fancy, the majority of the girls from the city preferring flowers, while the boys chose birds. Mrs. Catlin and some other women who had no children to dress, assisted the city children by buying the paper and helping them make their costumes.

At four the fête was in full swing, with the many gay blossoms running about playing with bright-colored birds. The wide expanse of lawn had never presented such a gorgeous sight, when suddenly, Simon appeared with two men, who carried tripods and boxes. Immediately, all the adults knew they were going to have a picture taken, and many thought it was a little surprise of Mrs. Talmage's. The children

were called to group themselves as quickly as possible, and the elders stood in the background until the click of the camera told everyone the work was done.

One of the two men then stepped out in front of the crowd and thanked the people, adding, "If someone will give me an idea of how many are present, we will send a picture for everyone. Our Editor will do this for a souvenir to the people who have been booming their town for the last few weeks."

Not until then did Mrs. Talmage and others realize that the photographers were from a city paper. And not until then did the property-owners of Oakdale realize that the time and money they were giving to the poor children was actually making such a stir in city papers that real estate values in the town would increase.

The two photographers were invited to remain and view the rest of the fête, and were given seats near the judges. The judges were Mrs. Talmage, Mrs. Starr, Mrs. Wells, Mrs. Stevens, and Mrs. Catlin, and were supposed to decide which child had the best imitation of what he, or she, represented.

Then Mr. Wells climbed upon a box and said,

"Mr. Starr, Mr. Stevens and myself brought over a package this afternoon, which is here at my feet, and we propose to present prizes to anyone who wins them in this way: Every bird, or blossom will have to step upon this box, where we all can view him, or her, and imitate the motions of the bird, or speak a few words about the flower represented. If anyone prefers to sing a song, or tell some anecdote, it will be considered just the same; but no one can enter this contest who does not assist with the entertainment. The ladies who have been elected judges will decide who are the winners. Now, everyone please be seated, in semicircles, about this box, so all may see the performance."

As Mr. Wells motioned every child into the circles, Ike and Simon were seen carrying the long kitchen table across the lawn. It was placed where the box had stood, having been sent for by Mrs. Talmage the moment she heard Mr. Wells' plan.

In a few minutes all were grouped about the table.

The child at the extreme left-hand end of the front was called upon to start the fun. He was helped to the top of the table, and as he was

a swallow, he had to show how a swallow acts.

Many of the children started to giggle when the little fellow stood there, with frightened look on his face.

"Ah, say, Dicky," one of his friends called out to him, "you'se know what swallers kin do? Ain't we seen the picters at night-school?"

Then Dicky took courage, and nodded. He threw back his head, looked up at the sky, and, waving his arms slowly up and down in wide sweeps, he trilled some high notes, and then, with head tipped on one side, then forward, then backward, his arms waved faster, and at last he gave a high spring and jumped clear over the judges' heads, landing upon his feet in the grass beyond.

A shout went up, as everyone clapped and laughed at the unexpected termination of the swallow's flight. The judges put their heads together and talked, finally writing down the name and address of the little fellow.

A tiger-lily came next. Her orange-colored petals were very graceful, and the leaves and stem of green showed that some one had given much time in the making of the dress, but the wearer was too shy to take the part of the bold

tiger-lily, and she stood upon the table looking down at her toes which were rubbing the table-top.

Finally, Mr. Wells said, "Now, Miss Tiger-lily, what have you to say about yourself?"

She looked at Mr. Wells and, with a flush said, "Tiger-lilies ain't much, anyway, they don't have no nice smell!"

Of course everyone laughed, and the little girl took courage, as she felt sure a prize would be hers, so she added, "You most all'us gets yeller all over your nose if you want to smell 'em."

Another laugh greeted her, as she was helped down from the table, and went to her seat.

The judges were of divided opinion about her, half of them thought the last remark deserved a reward, while the other half thought there would be better ones to come.

After this, dandelions followed red robins, and tulips came after wrens. Then there were daisies, orioles, corn-flowers, canaries, and many birds and varied blossoms, all taking part in the contest.

Row after row had been heard from, until the last row was reached, where sat the owls and Blue Birds. Great expectations were held for

these two. The owls were known to be clever boys, and when Meredith Starr went up, everyone waited with a smile. Meredith recited a poem from Poe, and did it well. Jinks came next, and stood upon the table, croaking and to-whooing in fine imitation of a hoot-owl. Then Ned, with quill back of his pointed ear, and a scroll in his claw, wailed up and down an owl-scale, the dirge of an owl in a ruined castle. This was well applauded, but Don Starr received most applause when he clambered to the table top and took a pair of huge steel-rimmed spectacles from his pocket, and sedately placed them across the hooked beak that covered his own little snub nose. He looked very funny in his tousled gray feathers, with the wide circle of downy feathers about the eyes. But the great spectacles completed a very amusing picture. Don seemed not to hear the titters, or remarks of the audience, as he cleared his throat to speak.

"Owls are not good for anything. They keep you awake all night with their hooting, and all this talk about their being so wise, is just all bosh! No one ever really knew an owl to be wise. Honest, now—*did* you?" asked Don, looking at the judges for an opinion.

Of course the judges were laughing so that they could not reply, and Don, waiting a few moments for the laughter to subside, and finding it did not, got down from the table in a disgusted frame of mind. To think all those folks *laughed* at him when he was telling them the truth!

In his hasty exit to the rear, he forgot to take off the specs and everyone looked at him to laugh again. This caused Don extra chagrin, and he wondered at the silly way some folks took a serious speech.

The Blue Birds stepped up after Don came back, and while they stood waiting for Mr. Wells to finish speaking with the judges, Ruth whispered to the others, "Just tell everyone what our Nest hopes to do, and what the Blue Birds organized for."

Ruth was called upon to speak first, so she stood up and said, "Blue Birds are happy, cheerful birds, whose duty it is to help others to be happy, too. Every Nest tries to live the Golden Rule."

Frances came next, and said, "Blue Birds help mother by running errands, being obedient, never cross and always willing."

Edith stepped up and said, "Blue Birds learn

to sew, sing, work or play, just as comes their way, to the best of their ability."

May said, "Blue Birds have Nests so they can learn the best way to live, and show others how to enjoy life as we do."

Norma said, "Blue Birds show by their daily lives of loving, true, and busy work, that the only way to grow right is to forget yourself and think of others."

Dot thought for a moment, then said, "Blue Birds are so happy, no matter what happens to them, that they never have any time to get the blues."

This remark caused applause, but it stopped to hear what little Betty had to say. She stood smiling at her friends before she said, "So many Blue Birds said just what I wanted to say, that there isn't anything left for me, except to tell you all that I am a real Blue Bird too, and I'm going to prove it by being all the good things my sister Blue Birds said to you."

This brought a crash of applause, and as Betty was the last one, the clapping kept up for a long time.

The judges went away to consider the merits of the performers, and, while the ice-cream and

cake was passed, the winners of the prizes were decided upon.

Betty's speech was awarded a prize, and she was given a little silver bird, in whose back was a velvet pin cushion.

The next prize was given the Blue Birds as a Nest. It was a silver-cased book which could be used for rules or good resolutions.

Don, much to his surprise, was called up to be given a prize of a folding cup to use in scouting or camp-life. Don was highly pleased with his reward and said, as he went back to join the other owls, "I didn't know you folks thought so much of serious talk like mine was."

Jinks poked Ned in the side, and both boys had to turn away their heads so Don wouldn't see how they laughed.

A score, or more, of prizes were distributed among the children, who had been clever in their performance.

After all the prizes had been given out Ned was called up to the table, and to his great surprise, was given a beautifully illuminated card which voted the thanks of the people for his tireless efforts in the work done toward making the past events a success.

Ned blushed with pleasure as he received the best prize of all—appreciation of work well done. He smiled happily as everyone wanted to see the daintily etched words.

About this time, the reporter and photographer from the city paper took their departure, with sensations not to be described. To be a resident of a town where everyone seemed to be a member of one large family was great! But to have everyone eager to help poor little strangers have a good time, was decidedly unusual. But most wonderful of all was the fact that all of this great activity, which had resulted in weeks of pleasure and fresh air for a hundred needy children from the crowded city, had been brought about by seven little girls banded together as the Blue Birds of Happy Times Nest.

CHAPTER XIII

THE BLUE BIRDS ENTERTAIN NEW VISITORS

Although the Fête was very enjoyable, it only netted a small sum from admission tickets, and the Fund still lacked sufficient money to pay for the third week of the second fifty children who were expected Saturday night.

That Saturday morning many bright eyes were dimmed with unshed tears at the thought of going back to dark homes and hot streets. The ladies who had assisted in entertaining the children felt regret at parting with them, but many of them held out promises to the children to bring them again for a visit.

Of course, most of the fifty children were grateful for the wonderful three weeks given them, and they felt that the next fifty children would be just as eager to get away from the hot city as they had been.

At eleven o'clock every child, dressed in the costume worn at the fête, stood waiting, with

bundles of fruit, cakes, clothing, and toys for the band which was to precede the march to the station.

It was Ruth's idea about sending the children home in their bird and blossom costumes.

"For," she said, "they will be so anxious to show everyone at home the lovely dresses, that they will forget to feel sorry about going."

Then Ned said that the band playing lively tunes for the children to march away by, would make them feel light and happy, too. So, the Oakdale Brass Band was again asked to give its services to help the children to keep up their spirits.

And so it proved. The anticipation of marching through town in gay costumes overcame the regret at leaving. Then, too, the admiration of everyone in the city who would turn to look after fifty children all costumed like flowers and birds, was something that did not come into everyone's life. And when they got home! All the stories of events that happened during those three weeks would last far into the winter.

The band met at the school-house door, and as they struck up the air of Yankee Doodle, every child started to beat time with its feet.

Mr. Wells soon came out, and the procession marched away, accompanied by everyone in town who could spare time from Saturday's duties.

The train, also, was a special furnished by the railroad company, so the visitors had plenty of time to settle themselves comfortably before it started. Many a hand-wave and shout followed the train as it left, and almost every head was thrust far out of the car windows to see the last of the place where there had been such a grand time.

"'Off with the old, on with the new,' is the case to-day, isn't it?" said Mrs. Catlin, as she accepted Mrs. Talmage's invitation to ride back in her car.

"Yes, I do hope the new arrivals will have as nice a time as these children seem to have had," said Mrs. Talmage.

"I suppose the matron will be ready for them, won't she?" asked Mrs. Stevens, who had come with Mrs. Talmage.

"She says she will; there are several women cleaning up, and getting everything in order for the next fifty. And she says supper will go on just as if the other fifty were here."

While Mrs. Talmage drove her friends to their

homes, the Blue Birds gathered in their Nest and wondered what there was left for anyone to do. Everything seemed to be done.

Mrs. Talmage came over the lawn in time to hear the last remarks, and she quickly suppressed the idea of lagging in the work by saying, "Do you forget that fifty children will be here to-night who have never visited the country, and to whom everything will be new? These poor dears will want some one to give attention to them now and then, and we must plan how to do that and raise the Fund to the sum needed for the last week."

"But, Mrs. Talmage, we've done everything, and everyone in town has paid to come to the bazaar, the Fourth of July Tree, and the Fête. They won't want to pay for the same thing again."

"Is there any reason why any of the same things should be given again?" asked Mrs. Talmage.

"Because we can't think of anything new," grumbled May.

"Oh, that little 'can't' that always stops folks from succeeding!" exclaimed Mrs. Talmage, impatiently.

"Well, now, mother, what *could* we do?" asked Ruth.

"I'm sure you could accomplish nothing at all if you all went to work in your present mood. But I want to ask you how you think managers of the theaters would get people to come and buy tickets to be amused, if they always gave the same three shows, and then sat down and said, 'Well, we can't get any new ideas. We found three, and that is all there are in the world.' Wouldn't you call them silly?"

The Blue Birds laughed at the very idea, and Betty said, "Mrs. Talmage, we might bake bird cookies for everyone in town, and sell 'em."

"At least, you have a new idea, dearie, and did not say, 'I can't!' But your idea will not be reasonable as I would have to turn wholesale baker for you, and our time can be given to better purposes just now."

"Mother, what would *you* suggest," asked Ruth.

"I should suggest that you overcome your tendency to let *ennui* overcome you. The first fifty children seemed like a new toy to everyone here, but the second fifty will have become an everyday matter, and so will lose much of the pleasure

given to the first ones. This is not right—to make the poor children suffer for the overzeal of folks who made so much of the first ones. If everyone will try and do their best to find some way to entertain these fifty, the victory will be won, for 'everyone' means all together."

"Well, I for one, will promise to do all I can!" cried Ruth.

"So will I!" echoed the others, and Mrs. Talmage smiled to think she had won the fight.

"Then, the first thing to do, is to think of some way to earn that money for the third week. You can all feel assured of the help of Mr. Wells, Mr. Stevens, and Mr. Starr, besides of all the ladies," advised Mrs. Talmage, as she walked toward the steps to descend.

"Oh, aren't you going to stay and help us think?" said several voices.

"Not this time. I'm going to the house and do some thinking on my own account; besides, I want to see what kind of thought you Blue Birds can have if left to yourselves."

"Fluff, I guess you'll have to start this thinking," ventured Dot.

"Oh, dear, everyone always thinks I can do everything," said Ruth, in a weary tone.

"Suppose we all sit still for five minutes and try to think out something," suggested Betty.

As this seemed sensible, an unusual quiet reigned in the Nest as Ned crossed the garden. He saw several heads bowed low, but not a word did he hear.

"Hi, there! What's wrong? Any of you Blue Birds lose a wing?"

Dot looked over the edge of the Nest and laughed down at Ned, while Ruth said, "I guess our five minutes are up."

"What are you doing?" asked Ned as he came up the steps.

"Just thinking," replied Ruth.

"Thinking! My, is it such a piece of work as you all seem to make of it?" he laughed.

So he was told why they sat there trying to think out some plan that would entertain, as well as earn money.

"Well," said he, "did anyone think it?"

"You came along just as we were going to find out," retorted Edith.

"Then tell us now—what was your think?" laughed Ned.

"I haven't any, but ask Fluff—Fluff, you first."

"No, sir, not this time! I always have to be first when some plan is wanted. Now, I vote that the last one coming in this Nest shall be the first one to tell a plan."

"Yes, yes!" agreed the other children, eagerly, looking to Ned for the answer.

"Why, I haven't time to think yet," replied Ned.

"Oh, but you keep all kinds of good ideas all ready to tell, back in your mind," said Ruth hurriedly. "You're just like Mother in that way. So you tell first."

Ned whistled a long crescendo, and at the sound, he suddenly stopped and cried, "Say, that's it!"

"What?" asked the girls.

"A concert with all you birds to sing or whistle songs and things."

"Oh, Ned!" said Ruth, reprovingly. "Besides, only Dot knows how to whistle, because Don is always whistling."

"Humph! That's too bad—can't have that, can we?"

"It seems too bad we can't use those lovely crêpe paper dresses again," mused May, regretfully.

"Maybe we could do something with them," said Betty.

"Oh, no, we couldn't have another fête or bazaar, you know," replied Norma.

"I wonder if we could have a circus? The town hasn't had its circus this year, you know," ventured Dot.

"Leave it to Dot to think of a wild and hilarious time," laughed Ned.

"But, Dot, we haven't a wild animal in the town, and no one who can swing on a trapeze or ride bareback. And what is a circus without those?" said Edith.

"If there were only other kinds of circuses besides animal kinds, we might plan something," said Ruth.

"Ned, does a circus really mean animals?" asked Norma.

"Why, no, not exactly. The word circus comes from the ancient Roman times and was the place they used for races, games or public shows. Nowadays, it means a place for performing animals, or queer tricks."

"Then, we really don't need animals or trapezes, do we?" asked Dot, with evident disappointment.

"Not if you girls are going to perform," retorted Ned.

"Well, if a circus really means what Ned said it does, we might use our crêpe costumes and have tableaux," said Ruth.

"Oh, wait a second! I have an idea!" called Ned, beating his brow with his fist as if to knock the idea out to the ground.

"Here it is! Let's call it a 'Blue Bird Circus.' That will show it is to be a bird circus, and then you can dress like birds and play charades and tableaux."

"Where would we act?" asked Dot, loath to relinquish the hope of a modern kind of circus.

"We will have to settle that later, but let's go and ask mother what she thinks of Ned's idea," said Ruth.

Mrs. Talmage was on the veranda with Mrs. Catlin, going over long lists of figures which the matron had given them. There was also a paper containing the list of necessities for the expected children.

After saying "good-afternoon" to Mrs. Catlin, Ruth said, "Mother, Ned's helped us to an idea."

"Indeed! Then let us hear all about it," said Mrs. Catlin.

The circus plan was described, but Mrs. Talmage did not seem to like it as much as the children thought she would.

"In the first place, it must not be anything like you have had. It would not be right to mislead people into paying admission to a show by a new name, and then find out that it was a counterfeit of an old one. The idea of a bird circus is all right, but not the display of the same costumes, or anything that is done just to get the money. To make a thing a success, it should be of such a quality that everyone will want to enjoy it."

"Your mother has the right idea, children," said Mrs. Catlin, approvingly.

"Well," said Ruth, impatiently, "I'm sure that way back in my mind there is a plan that is worth pulling out of the cobwebs."

Everyone laughed at Ruth's queer way of expressing herself.

"When one feels like that," said her mother, "the only thing to do is to go off by oneself and think, and think, until the thought is pulled out. Now, scatter! Everyone go alone and think. In half an hour I will ring the big bell, and then you may come and tell what you've thought.

Ned, go to your den, and Ruth, you go to the library. Dot can sit by the fountain where the tinkling of water will help, and Betty can throw herself down on the moss under the arbor. All, run to some spot, or another, and *think!*"

Mrs. Talmage "shoo-ed" with her hands until all the Blue Birds had dispersed, then she sat down again with Mrs. Catlin, to conclude their talk.

The figuring was almost done, when Ned poked his head out of the side door and said, "Mother, I've an idea! Won't you ring that bell?"

"It is almost half an hour, so let them come," said Mrs. Catlin, laughingly.

Ned was sent for the bell, and soon stood on the veranda ringing it loudly. The children came running so swiftly from every direction that the ladies laughed.

"They're so afraid of missing the first word," said Mrs. Talmage.

When the children were assembled, Ruth danced out, with a large flat book under her arm. "I've got it!" she cried, "I've got it!"

"What is it—let's see?" cried the others.

"Guess what? One turn around, because it's

just the right idea, and we would never have thought of it, if I hadn't spied this book on the table in the library."

"Oh, I know what it is—I left the book there when I used it to get an idea for my owl costume," said Ned.

Ruth nodded delightedly at her brother.

"Yes, that's it! I sat in the arm-chair thinking hard, and looking straight at the table, until finally, I saw this book there, and when I ran over to look at it, I found it was the funny bird-book by Carolyn Wells."

As Mrs. Talmage turned the pages one by one, and read the verses aloud, the children laughed at the queer birds and funny explanations.

"The ideas are splendid for charades," said Mrs. Catlin, "and those which are not quite appropriate we can eliminate."

Before anything more could be said about the matter, however, the whistle of an engine was distinctly heard, and the music of a brass band floated to them over the trees.

"It's the new children coming on the train!" cried Ruth.

"Oh, dear, I promised to be there with Jinks and Mete," called Ned, running off to the tool

house. In a minute more the Blue Birds saw him racing, on his bicycle, toward the road.

"I am eager to meet them, too," said Mrs. Talmage.

"Come then, let us all get into my car—we will get there before all of the children are off the train," suggested Mrs. Catlin, as she jumped up and led the way to her automobile which stood on the drive, in the shade of a tree.

In another moment, everyone was in the car —pell-mell—and Mrs. Catlin was speeding down the hill, leaving her chauffeur, with staring eyes, standing at Simon's side.

They arrived at the station just as the children were being helped off the cars. The band stood grouped on the platform, surrounded by admiring youngsters, to whom this trip to the country seemed like a fairy-tale.

When all were off the train, a line of march was formed, and the parade went up the street, just as the other fifty children had done. When the school-house was reached, the band played several lively tunes and left the children to their supper.

Mrs. Catlin and Mrs. Talmage were left alone in the car the moment the procession started,

and all the children from Oakdale escorted their visitors. Finally, Ned hurried over with his bicycle and asked Mrs. Catlin if it could be placed inside the machine, as he wanted to march back with the boys.

"That doesn't look as if interest is flagging," laughed Mrs. Catlin, nodding at the crowd of children skipping by the side of the new guests.

"No, I am glad to say it is not," added Mrs. Talmage.

CHAPTER XIV

THE BLUE BIRDS' CIRCUS

Ned was very busy for a few days after the circus had been decided upon, getting out the circulars, programs, and papers for distribution.

The time for the entertainment was to be at night, so all the business men could come with their families. As a large crowd was expected, the school assembly hall was to be used for the event.

Admission tickets were ten, twenty-five and fifty cents,—the latter for three rows of reserved seats. All the reserved seats were sold the first day, and Ned consulted with the Blue Birds about it.

"We had better print some more reserved seats, as I haven't had time to see half the people who will buy them," said Ned.

"Then let's make five more rows," advised Dot.

"If we made all those rows reserved, the people in the last few rows couldn't see any better than the back rows," objected Ruth.

So, after much debating, Ned was instructed to have two more rows of reserved seats at thirty-five cents a seat. This was Ruth's idea of treating the others with justice.

As this entertainment needed more practice for the actors, the date was set down for Monday night, a week after the children's arrival in Oakdale.

The Owls were very anxious to assist in the charades and the Blue Birds were delighted to have them.

Little else was talked of in the families where the children were members of the Blue Birds or Owls. While all this under-current of excitement was going on, however, many other amusements were planned for, and enjoyed by the city children. Mrs. Mason, whose two little boarders were so well and healthy, enlisted the interest of some other farmers, and a number of huge hay-wagons took all the children on a straw-ride. They stopped at a distant farm and had milk and doughnuts, with all kinds of fun in the

meadows and orchards, and returned at sundown.

Then, Mrs. Catlin planned a berrying party, and they tramped through woods and fields until the wild country promised to produce the berries wanted. Here, the city children enjoyed picking the fruit they had never seen growing before. At noon, an automobile came up the road, and some ladies got out and took refreshments from under the seats. That was a fine treat, and the walk, combined with the outdoor exercise, made every child sleep well that night.

For a few days after the berrying party, nothing of moment occurred until the day of the great event.

The night of the circus arrived at last, and the performers felt quite elated as they peeped through the stage curtains and saw the hall fill rapidly. By eight o'clock the seats were all filled, and Mr. Wells stepped before the curtains to make a short speech.

The audience were eager to see the sawdust ring they were sure would be back of the curtains, but nothing was visible beside Mr. Wells with his book. "Friends," he began, "as each tableau is acted before your eyes, do not hesi-

tate to call out your answers to the charade. If one is correct I will hold up my right hand, but no motion will be given until the proper name of the act is found."

Thereupon a signal was given, and seven little girls filed out upon the platform, and jumped about. Their costumes were made to represent parts of insects: wings of beetles, made of paper and colored, butterflies' wings, made of gauze, the striped body of a moth, and a shiny June bug body.

All the bugs hopped about and had a merry time, but no one could guess what it represented. Finally, a boy called out and asked, "What kind of a bug are they showing?"

Mr. Wells smiled and shook his head, while Mr. Starr replied, "Just bug!"

Then, it was discovered that the actors had given the last act first, and it had to be explained to the audience that the first act was forgotten, but would be acted then.

Of course, this brought a laugh, but the Owls were disgusted and said to the Blue Birds, "Dear me, after all your coaching you forget the very first thing!"

The queer little bugs laughed at their mistake

and came back on the stage making loud and soft noises, like "Zum, zum-m, zum-m-m-m!"

This sound was kept up for a time, and everyone was asking their neighbor what under the sun the bug was that was making that noise. Bees, beetles, crickets, katydids, and many other kinds were called but none was right.

"If I knew the tune that hum was making," said little Jamie Ferris to Mrs. Mason in a loud whisper, "maybe I could guess the bug."

Mr. Stevens overheard Jamie, and immediately put the two together.

"Ah, I have it!" he called. "It is 'Hum-bug!' "

It was, and a clapping rewarded the combined efforts of Jamie and Mr. Stevens, and then number two was announced.

Ned and his friends came out dressed as miners. With spade and pick, they worked over a heap of dirt and stones. Suddenly, Jinks started, and stooped to snatch a lump out of the dirt. The others crowded about while he picked off pieces of crust, and then washed the lump in a pan of water. The others stood envying their companion his luck and passing the lump from one hand to another, picking it and nodding their heads eagerly.

The acting was so well done that a dozen voices shouted, "Gold."

Mr. Wells held up his right hand, but some boy in the audience asked, "You sure the cart ain't before the horse, again?"

Everyone laughed good-naturedly, but Mr. Wells signaled for the second half of the charade. Immediately a few girls came out dressed to imitate eagles. They strutted about while Mr. Wells read from Carolyn Wells' book, the verse,

"He has no wings apparently, yet I
Or you, or anyone can make him fly,
He's very powerful—held in great esteem
And money talks, so let the eagle scream."

The quotation helped so much that many called out the answer: "Gold Eagles."

"I shall now call for the third charade, which will not be guessed quite so readily, I think," said Mr. Wells, as he motioned the performers to come out.

Ned walked out winding his watch. Then Jinks followed, with his watch held to his ear. Meredith came next, and took his watch from his pocket, then put it back. This he did several times, until Don came out, placed a cheap toy

watch on the floor and jumped upon it. He picked up the pieces and looking at the audience, shook his head over the fragments.

Everyone knew the acting had something to do with a watch, but what it was, they could not tell. So, as no one guessed it, the second act was called for.

Immediately, a huge dog, such as was never seen before, was led out by Ruth.

Ruth was dressed like a Swiss peasant girl, and the dog was supposed to look like a St. Bernard. It was made of long curly wool, and its mouth hung open, while the front legs seemed to want to paw up in the air, while the dog stood upon his hind legs. Of course, everyone knew it was a dog costume with a boy inside it, and the part was well played. But what the charade was, nobody could guess. After many foolish guesses had been made, someone said, "It must be a Swiss Watch."

"Then where does the dog come in?" said another man.

"Why, just because he is a Swiss St. Bernard"

Mr. Wells smiled at every guess, however, and shook his head. Finally, he read from the book,

"Gaze on his open, honest face—
There's no deception in his case
He is attached to us, 'tis plain,
Though often by a slender chain."

This gave the cue, and soon someone called "Watch-dog," which was the correct answer, and the fun proceeded.

The next charade was quite elaborate, as several girls had on feather-covered costumes shaped somewhat like pigeons. Their legs were wound with yellow muslin, and they billed and cooed together, while their arms, encased in imitation wings, fluttered up and down. The costumes had been very difficult to make and many markets were besieged for feathers to paste on the muslin forms.

This act was quickly answered, and, as "pigeons" was correct, Mr. Wells held up his hand and the second part appeared.

A great, green toad hopped forth upon the stage, and followed the pigeons about. As the children saw the black spots, the yellow belly, and the long legs with big, horrid toes, they laughed and stamped with their feet, but no one could think who could be in the skin. The toad would

open and shut his gaping mouth now and then, and make everyone laugh. Finally, Mr. Wells read aloud:

"The children bring him in, to our amaze,
And, though we try to turn him out, he stays.
He's never seen with soldiers, nor with fops,
But with the schoolboys how he jumps and hops."

This verse confused the audience, more than it helped to solve the riddle, and many were the guesses that were wrong!

At last, a childish voice protested, "Why, they is nothin' but jus' pigeon an' toad!"

"Oh, ho!" laughed Mr. Starr, "our Don has them!"

"So has my little girl," laughed a lady near him, as she understood the charade, and soon, everyone was laughing and shouting, "Pigeon-toed!"

Mr. Wells held up his hand for the next charade, and Ruth came out carrying a rocking chair. She sat down and opened a book which she was careful to show the audience was called "The Shuttle." Soon Norma came out and tried to thread a machine shuttle. She did this sev-

eral times, and someone in the front seat, said "Shuttle." As it was so evident, Mr. Wells held up his right hand, and immediately, from the side-screens, walked forth a very proud rooster. He crowed several times and tried to flap his wings, but only one wing would move when Ned tried to wave both.

This charade was quite easy, and the correct answer of "Shuttle-Cock" was quickly given. The next required quite an elaborate setting, so the curtains were dropped for a few minutes. When they were raised again there stood prison bars, made of twisted strips of brown paper fastened to a large frame. Behind the bars stood, and crouched, a few murderous looking prisoners with villainous uniforms, shaking their fists at the audience. One of them,—it might have been Jinks with dreadful smears of grease upon his face, and hair standing on end,—got up and slouched back and forth, stopping to glare at the amused audience, now and then.

Many attempts were made to solve the riddle, but no one could guess it, and Mr. Wells had to call for the second part of the same charade.

A queer bird in striped jail-like costume,

hopped about the stage, pecking at the prison bars, and bobbing its head up and down in front of the prisoners. As it hopped out in front of the audience to bow, some boys called out, "One's a prison and the other's a bird."

This gave the cue to the correct answer, which was "Jail Bird." Mr. Wells motioned the prisoners to roll away the bars, and before they were quite through, some impatient actors hurried forth, carrying hods filled with bricks. One of the hod-carriers bumped into a prisoner, and the bricks rattled to the stage-floor, but both boys jumped aside so their toes were not hit by the bricks.

This caused a laugh, but the bricklayers seemed too busy to care. They started to erect a brick-wall upon the stage; while they worked, a huge bat flew uncertainly across the stage, over their heads.

The audience heard pulleys squeaking, and as the bat moved forward, it tried to flap its wings up and down, but they got caught in one of the wires which was carrying him across; every effort was made to get the wires moving again but they stuck fast. At last Mr. Wells had to lay down the book and go over to carry out the

step-ladder which Mrs. Talmage had shoved forth. He got up and disentangled the wing of the poor bat who was fearfully watching the wire overhead in dread of its breaking and letting him fall upon the heads of the busy bricklayers.

All the time Mr. Wells was acting "first aid to the injured," the audience sat and laughed or clapped their hands in approval. At last, the bat was released, and the ladies behind the scenes pulled again at the wires and the night-bird reached his longed-for rest.

Meantime, the brick wall progressed with great speed and as it was completed, the three bricklayers started to march off, but Don's hod must have tilted too far back, and touched the wall. Without wavering, the bricks tumbled over and the wall fell like those of Jericho—with a mighty crash.

During the roar that greeted this second mishap, a loud voice shouted, "Give us some more Brick-Bats!" and a wild clapping of hands showed that the audience preferred the fun to the acting.

After the confusion had subsided, Mr. Wells spoke: "The Blue Birds hoped to have all bird

charades, but the Owls, who are assisting, preferred some of the queer things from this book, therefore the following charade might be called beastly."

Mr. Wells smiled at his own pun, and his friends smiled with him. Then, two boys came out, carrying some wood and saws. They started with eagerness to saw the wood into pieces. Mr. Starr saw his son working hard at the wood-sawing, and laughingly declared, "It was never thus at home."

This speech was greeted with laughter, and Meredith turned and tried to distinguish his father in the crowd. Before he knew it, however, a wild beast galloped out from behind the scenes and made a lunge at him. The horns of the animal (which reminded folks of the fine antlers seen in Mrs. Catlin's hall) came in contact with Meredith's saw, and in another moment there was a confused and struggling heap of boy, deer and horns on the floor. The deer had difficulty in getting the heavy antlers untangled, but, finally, Jinks rose, minus his horns, the horsehair costume being all that was left to make him look like a deer.

"Tramps object to this fearful thing," said

Mr. Wells, coming to the rescue, "when, instead of apple-pie they are directed to use——?"

"Oh, sure! I know," laughed a farmer from the rear. "Don't I have a time tryin' to make my boy do that same chore with the saw-buck every mornin'?"

Everyone laughed in sympathy with the farmer, and as it was the last charade given, Mr. Wells went behind the scenes to help the buck get out of the costume.

Mrs. Talmage stepped before the curtain and asked the audience to remain seated, as some very fine music would now be enjoyed.

In a few minutes the curtain parted wide enough to show a young man of about Ned's build, with twirled mustachios and wildly tousled hair, *à la artiste,* holding a violin and bow. With a sweeping bow to the audience, he placed the instrument under his chin and held the bow ready to play. In another second wonderful chords and sweet tones came from a violin, apparently being played by the violinist before them. The solo continued with a faint accompaniment from a harp, unseen behind the curtain. It came to an end, and the player bowed and backed off the stage. The delighted audience clapped and

wanted to hear more, but there was no response. Instead, two young ladies, in height the same as Dot and Ruth, stepped out. They were dressed in old-fashioned costumes of fifty years ago, and had great difficulty in managing the hoops of the skirts when they made their bow.

An unseen orchestra commenced to play, and then the two young ladies sang "Oh, that we two were maying," just as well as it was ever sung by Louise Homer and Alma Gluck. The singers threw back their heads and opened wide their mouths, making all the motions of singing. But, in a long pause where the accompaniment only can be heard, the two singers forgot to close their mouths and kept on with the opening and closing, until the audience notified them of their error by laughing outrageously at them.

The moment the audience realized that a victrola was doing the work, while the actors were dumb performers, they insisted upon hearing the violin solo again, and the young man helped move the victrola out and stood by while it played the piece that had won such hearty applause for him.

Mr. Wells then said that after a talk on "Life in a Lumber Camp," by Mr. Starr, a last charade

would be given, which had been postponed, owing to the "Bird" being so busy in getting out of his deer skin.

Mr. Starr gave a short lecture which was illustrated with camera pictures enlarged and thrown on a screen.

Immediately following the lecture, several Blue Birds came out upon the stage, carrying suit-cases, umbrellas, and tickets. They peered at the tickets, asked questions of each other, and finally saw a railroad time-table hanging upon the wall, from which they got the information they wanted.

The acting was good, and soon someone guessed, "Traveling." Then, the second act was called, and a great crane stepped from behind the curtain. The long bill which had been fastened to his head, seemed to be greatly in his way when he wanted to see what the travelers were reading. The costume was made of muslin covered over with chicken feathers, and stuffed out with cushions. After the crane knew how to manage his bill, he stalked about poking the nosy member into the girls' backs, and pushing it up under their hats and umbrellas. This caused much mirth among the children, and the

correct answer to the charade was soon given.

The "Traveling Crane" then disappeared back of the curtains, and Mr. Wells thanked the audience for their kind attention, and on behalf of the performers, wished everyone a good-night.

Numerous groups of friends stood about chatting socially for some time after the good-night had been spoken, but the committee were seated back of the scenes counting out the proceeds.

Before the crowd dispersed, the result was known. The evening's entertainment had brought in money enough so the city children could remain their full three weeks. As the fact became known hats and handkerchiefs were waved and the cry was given, "Three cheers for the Blue Birds."

CHAPTER XV

A DOLL TOWN RECEPTION

For several days after the Blue Birds' circus, a drizzly rain fell, so the children could not enjoy out-of-doors play. The Blue Birds met in Ned's den the first day, and wondered what they could do. Of course, the entertainment of the night before was thoroughly discussed, and many funny things were recalled.

"How glad I am the city children can stay the three weeks," said Betty.

"I was wondering what they would do on such a horrid day as this is," said Norma.

"The other children had mother to tell them stories on the day it rained," added Ruth.

Mrs. Talmage had just entered the room, and overheard Ruth's words.

"Yes," she replied, "and I was thinking just before I came in here, what a fine morning it would be for the Blue Birds to visit there and show the children how to make a doll town."

"Doll Town!" exclaimed the children.

"We don't know what it is," added Dot.

"I'll tell you about it, and then, if you choose, you may take the patterns over and show the other children how to do it, and they can have great fun playing," said Mrs. Talmage.

As there was nothing more interesting to do, the Blue Birds were eager to hear about Doll Town.

"We had better use the dining-room table which is large enough for every one of us to sit about, and have room for our materials," said Mrs. Talmage. "Fluff, you lead the way, while I go to the library and get the things we shall need."

In a few minutes Mrs. Talmage followed the Blue Birds to the dining-room, carrying large sheets of cardboard, pencils, scissors, and a box of water-colors. These she laid upon the table.

"Fluff," she said, "will you run up to the sewing-room and bring us several fashion books?"

Ruth scampered off and soon returned with the books which contained colored fashion pictures. These Mrs. Talmage distributed among the seven little girls, so arranging them that each one had some children, a mother, a maid, and

other members of the family. The men, however, had to be found in a tailor's fashion book, which was found in a drawer of Mr. Talmage's dresser. It mattered not that the styles were old-fashioned, as long as there were enough men to answer for father, brother, gardener, or butler in each family.

Mrs. Talmage showed the girls how to cut out the dolls, until every family group was complete. She then showed her interested workers how to cut out furniture.

The large sheets of cardboard were divided into different sized sections, and upon each piece she sketched a bureau, a bed, chair, desk, and other articles needed to furnish a house.

One queer thing the Blue Birds noticed, and soon asked about, was the little tab left at the bottom of every piece of furniture.

"You will soon see how necessary they are," said Mrs. Talmage, smiling.

She handed the pieces about and showed the girls how to cut along the solid pencil lines, and how to score the cardboard with a sharp knife along the dotted lines, and then fold it along the scoring.

For a time, everything was quiet. Betty was

cutting out a bed, Dot snipped away at a chair, Ruth had a sideboard, and so on. Betty finished her cutting first, as the bed was easier to do than a chair. Mrs. Talmage then told her to bring the bed over and she would show her what to do next.

The bed was creased at the four corners, and when it met at the fourth, a pin was fastened through to hold it in shape. Then the extra tabs at the bottom of each leg were bent over half-way toward the center, making a flat rest for the bed to stand upon. The girls watched carefully, and saw that the tabs answered for strong braces to the furniture.

Betty was delighted with the bed.

"But there isn't springs or mattress for it, and a doll would fall right through," she said.

"You'll soon have springs, if you do as I tell you," smiled Mrs. Talmage, taking a small piece of cardboard and cutting it the size of the bed, but leaving a long tab on each end.

"What's that for?" asked Betty.

"Now watch me, and you will see," said Mrs. Talmage, as she bent the tabs over and hung the "springs" inside the bed with the tabs over the edges to hold it up in place. The springs fitted

quite well, and all the girls were impatient to make a bed also.

"All you Blue Birds complete the article you now are working on, while Betty and I go upstairs to find some muslin for sheets and mattresses," advised Mrs. Talmage, taking Betty's hand and going out of the room.

The children worked eagerly, and when their teacher returned they were all ready to have their furniture bent and put together.

"I have the bureau all cut out, but how are you ever going to fit the top on under the mirror?" asked Dot.

"Just this way," said Mrs. Talmage. "First, bring the front, sides and back together, and pin the side to the back where they meet. Now, bend the top piece over from the front, and fit it in under the mirror. Now, bend in the tabs on the feet, and presto! The dresser stands ready."

"If I may use the water-colors, I believe I can make it look just like oak," said Dot, immensely pleased with the dresser.

"That is a good idea," said Mrs. Talmage, pushing the color-box across the table. "See if you can make the paper look like real oak."

As Mrs. Talmage bent over and fastened together the furniture belonging to the others, she said, "These pieces are not for use, as they are far too small for your paper-dolls, but they can be used for models. I haven't any more cardboard, but I wanted to show you how to do the work so you can show the children at the school-house. I thought we could take the machine and go to the stores for all the cardboard, and other things we will need, and then teach the others how to make furniture."

"That will be lots of fun, but just think of all the furniture there will be about," returned Norma.

"Each little child will have her own, and she can do as she pleases with it. But we must hurry and decide whether we are going to town, as it is almost twelve o'clock, and you children will have to go home to lunch before you can come to the school-house for the afternoon."

"Oh, yes, all of us want to do it!" cried Ruth, seconded by the others.

So Mrs. Talmage went to the telephone and called Ike to bring the car to the front door. The Blue Birds hurried into rain-coats, hats, and overshoes, and were ready by the time Ike came

around. They all managed to squeeze inside, and the machine soon had them in front of the largest stationery shop in Oakdale. Here, Mrs. Talmage selected a good stiff quality of cardboard, and had the clerk send a whole ream to the school-house before two o'clock.

"What's a ream?" asked Betty.

"A ream is five hundred sheets," replied Mrs. Talmage.

"We now wish to look at water-color paints," said Mrs. Talmage to the obliging clerk.

"Just ordinary ones, or moist colors, in tubes, madam?" he asked.

"Oh, just a cheap grade, as they are only for the children to play with during the rain," replied Mrs. Talmage.

"Mrs. Talmage, what does moist mean, or the other kind he said?" asked May, wonderingly, as the clerk took several boxes from the shelf, and showed them to his customer.

"This box of japanned tin, with the soft, moist paint in little tubes is expensive, as the paints are used for fine water-color work; but these little wooden boxes with small dry cakes of color, are cheaper, and are used by softening the cake with water. They will do for our furniture, as

we only want to color the cardboard to look like wood."

After this, some pencils and blunt kindergarten scissors were purchased, and the merry party left the store, to find a dry-goods store nearby where they could buy some thread, needles, pins, muslin for mattresses, swiss for curtains, and a piece of narrow baby ribbon.

"Now, Ike, take these children home for their lunch, while Ruth and I stop at the school-house to leave these things and tell the matron of our plans."

Ike did as he was told, and soon returned for his mistress and Ruth. The matron was greatly relieved when she heard the plan to keep the children quietly engaged during the long rainy afternoon.

As Mrs. Talmage was about to step into the machine, she turned to Ike and said, "Ike, after you take us home, will you go to some tailor and see if he has any old men's fashion papers? I don't care how many years they may be out of style, as we only want to use them for dolls. I will pay him a fair price for them. Then, you may go right on down to your sister's farm and see if the Ferris children and Tommy and Tess

want to come to the school this afternoon to play doll-house."

The Blue Birds had been asked to bring their own scissors and needles, and meet Mrs. Talmage in the vestibule of the school about two o'clock. When Ruth and her mother arrived there at that time, there waited the six little Blue Birds, impatient to start their furniture-making game.

Ike had brought the four children from the farm, and they sat in the hall waiting. So, as soon as hats and wraps were laid aside, the matron escorted all the visitors to the gymnasium where the city children were trying to amuse themselves as best they could on such a rainy day.

"Children," explained the matron to the attentive crowd, "Mrs. Talmage and the Blue Birds are going to show you how to make doll furniture. If any of you would rather read or sew, than play at this work, you may sit in the reception room, where you will not be disturbed."

The matron waited for their reply, but only two or three of the older children rose with their books to leave the room. The other children crowded about the long table which had been

built down the center of the room for the children to use.

The cardboard, which had been delivered, and the other parcels brought by Mrs. Talmage were placed together on a table which stood upon the platform. Here, Mrs. Talmage stood to teach everyone just how to use the scissors in cutting paper.

The sample furniture made in the morning was taken out of a box and passed around for the children to look at, then the parcels were opened and the children saw a great pile of cardboard sheets for them to use. The pins, thread, and other things being placed down the center of the long board table, the Blue Birds were told to help the other children in folding and cutting, while the matron and Mrs. Talmage outlined the furniture with pencils.

Just as Mrs. Talmage started to draw a bed, someone knocked at the door. The matron opened it, and showed in Mrs. Catlin and Mrs. Stevens.

"Oh, you're just the ones I need," cried Mrs. Talmage, as she explained what the matron and she were going to do. "So many furniture makers are waiting to begin their work, I was won-

dering if it wouldn't be better to telephone you to help, and here you are!"

The two newcomers gladly consented to help, and soon, beds, dressers, and every kind of household furniture was being cut out by the delighted children. As the children cut, bent, or colored, Mrs. Catlin made Swiss window curtains, Mrs. Stevens cut out mattresses, and sheets, while the matron cut out rugs. Mrs. Talmage called up Ike on the telephone, and gave him an order, but no one heard what was said.

In a few minutes Ike came in carrying several heavy sample books of wall paper, which had been gladly given to him by decorators, who had no further use for them.

Mrs. Talmage had Ike lay them on the floor, and then followed him from the room. In the hall, she said, "Ike, do you think you can find some grocers who have a number of clean soap boxes on hand? If so, see if you can have them bring them over here this afternoon so we can make doll houses for these children."

Ike smiled, thinking of the fun they would have while making the houses.

"How many shall I get?" he asked.

"Well, there are seven Blue Birds, four from

your sister's house, and about thirty city children who are engaged in making furniture. The small boys are enjoying the work as well as the girls, so we would want about forty boxes."

Ike said that was a great many to get on such short notice, but would see what he could do. When the matron heard what Ike had been sent after, she said to Mrs. Talmage, "We have several new boxes downstairs that can be brought up if Ike doesn't get enough for everyone."

In an hour's time, grocer's wagons began to stop at the school-house with boxes. Ike drove back to say that thirty-four boxes were all that could be found in the stores, but the matron had enough to meet the need. Then the children were told to go downstairs and select their houses. As most of the boxes were the same size and shape, there were no disputes over the choice, and each child picked up a box and hurried back to the room where furniture was the all-absorbing work. The boxes were well cleaned, and Mrs. Catlin, Mrs. Talmage and the matron took india ink and printed the name of each child upon the top of her box, and then showed them how to make partitions of cardboard inside the box.

While this was being done, Mrs. Stevens was cutting tiny bureau scarfs, doilies, and fancy mats from the Swiss bits that were left over.

The partitions were so fastened in the box that one could have two or four rooms. Mrs. Talmage selected a piece of glazed tile paper from the sample book, and cutting it the size of the kitchen, tacked it down at each corner.

"There," she said, "isn't that a nice marble floor in the kitchen?"

"Now, I shall carpet the parlor, dining-room and bedroom," she added, selecting a dull, regular-patterned paper for the dining-room carpet, a lovely rose-sprayed one for the parlor, and a light, dainty vined pattern for the bedroom.

The matron had gone to the kitchen while the papers were being selected, and now returned with a tin can of paste, and a paint brush which was found in the janitor's room. With these materials, Mrs. Talmage soon had the rooms carpeted. Then she looked through the books again, and chose paper for the walls of the rooms. As she cut out the papers she explained to the children about the value of always having good ideas in decorating a home.

"A house that is dark inside should always

have light papers," she said; "one that faces north should have warm colors; one that faces south should have cool shades of paper, while windows that face east or west may have different kinds of paper, but seldom any gorgeous flowers or patterns.

"Then, a bedroom should always have a dainty floral design, which makes you think of sweet perfumes, lovely linen and peaceful dreams. A parlor should be papered to harmonize with the furniture. The kitchen should have painted walls, or tiled, if it is possible. The dining-room looks best if a rich dull wall covering is used. In this sample book of imitation leather paper are some nice colors, and enough for each one to do their dining-room. I shall select this leather paper with small designs in stripes. For the parlor, I will use this buff oatmeal paper and run a nice border about the top. The bedroom will be papered with this forget-me-not stripe paper, and the kitchen in the brown tile."

As Mrs. Talmage spoke, she took the papers out of the book, and smeared paste on the back of each strip. She showed the children just how to paste them in well, and then trimmed the edges at the ceiling with narrow borders. This

done, she set the four-roomed doll house upon the edge of the platform so everyone could see it and examine it if they wanted to see how to do their own.

While the children were busily engaged in getting their houses ready, the ladies cut out pieces of shiny white paper, and lined it off exactly, to represent panes of glass in a window. Several windows were pasted in each room of the model house, and the Swiss curtains tacked up over the top. These curtains were then draped back and tied with tiny loops of baby ribbon. Pictures were cut out of colored magazines and tacked upon the walls of the rooms. As the bedroom had no carpet on its floor, a wall-paper with large roses was selected, and a piece of Swiss just the size of the bedroom was laid over the rose paper, and tacked down at the corners. The Swiss made the roses of the paper show through and look like cloth. The dining-room was left with bare floor, for, as Mrs. Talmage said, "A plain floor with a rug here and there, is always better to keep clean, especially in a dining-room."

For the parlor, a heavily embossed paper of dark tones was cut out and tacked down, and

the model house was then ready for its furniture.

The children marveled at the cute little doll-house so soon made out of a soap box and waste wall papers, and each one eagerly worked at her own dwelling-place for dolls.

While they cut and pasted wall papers and carpets, Mrs. Talmage whispered to her friends, "I believe I will take a piece of paper and make a red brick chimney. The fireplace I will paint a brownish black, and the red bricks I will outline with white lines. I can paste this against the side wall in the kitchen and make it look like a real chimney."

The other ladies laughed, but urged her to try it. So, while they helped the children who were all working busily, Mrs. Talmage started her chimney.

She measured it, so all would be straight and look right, and then painted in the bricks and fireplace. When it was done, she pasted it against the kitchen wall of the model house, and it looked so cute, that straightway every child declared, "I'm going to have a chimney, too!"

It was past five o'clock before anyone was willing to stop, yet the houses were not all carpeted,

although the partitions were in, and the walls covered. A few of the quicker workers had the tile paper down in their kitchens, but time for play was over, and everyone had to get ready for supper.

And the visitors had to go home.

"Oh, we've all had such a lovely time, let's all pray that it rains again to-morrow!" said Betty.

The Blue Birds thought that was a good idea, and promised to do as she had said; but the city children seemed not quite to grasp Betty's meaning.

It *did* rain all the next day, and they met in the recreation room where the houses had been left exactly as they were the night before. Before ten o'clock every cabinet-maker and carpenter was at work on the houses and the furnishings.

Some of the ladies showed the workers how to make the chimneys, while some mixed colors and helped them to make oak-stained furniture, mahogany, and walnut. A few of the Blue Birds even took the extra trouble to paint handles on the bureau drawers and wardrobes.

Dot finished her house first, although it was not as pretty or as well done as Ruth's or Bet-

ty's. As she sat back and gazed at it, she heaved a sigh.

"Now," she said, "that's done, and I'm going to make a piano."

No one had thought of a piano, but as soon as Dot had mentioned it, Betty cried, "I'm going to have a victrola."

"And I think I'll have a pianola," added Norma.

"Girls, what do you think!" exclaimed Ruth, a smile creeping over her face. "I always wanted to play a church organ, and mother says I may take lessons some day, so I am going to make myself a pipe organ, and fasten it up against the side of my house."

Of course, Ruth's idea was the grandest of all, but the children wondered how she would make one, while the ladies laughed with amusement at the expensive tastes of the children.

"Well, Fluff, you might just as well choose an organ as a kitchen stove, because it won't be any harder to make," said May.

"I think the kitchen stove will be the more useful of the two," laughed the matron.

"It would if we had to eat, but paper dolls never get hungry, you know," replied Dot, wisely.

While the others laughed, Dot continued to cut out her piano, and soon had it folded and bent together.

"Now, Mrs. Talmage, will you please paint the black and white keys on the front?" asked the piano manufacturer.

The suggestion of a stove made some of the children decide to make one, so, many were still fussing with the stove-pipes when the twelve o'clock whistle on the paper mills blew.

"Time to go home to lunch," said Mrs. Talmage, as she rose and started to summon the Blue Birds.

"Oh, no indeed, Mrs. Talmage," said the matron, who came back into the room, having been absent for the last half-hour. "I planned to give everyone lunch to-day, and the cook just told me that everything was ready."

This not only pleased the city children, but also the Blue Birds, to think they would all have lunch together and not waste any precious time going back and forth to their homes.

The children were so intensely interested in their houses, that not half of them could say what they had had for lunch, although the cook had a nice luncheon of broth, fresh bread and

butter, baked potatoes, roast beef and rice. As soon as it was over, however, all hurried back to the recreation room to continue their work.

Five o'clock came all too soon, and found many of the houses furnished, but not finished with curtains, bedding, and other little things. As the visiting children put on their wraps a few of the city children were whispering together in a little group. Finally, one who was urged forward as spokesman, said, "We want to know if you will do what you said you were goin' to last night, to make it rain again to-morrer, all day?"

The wistful voice, the eager looks, and the doubt of anyone having the power to make or stop the rain, were all expressed in that group.

"Betty said she would pray," explained Ruth.

"Yes, that's it. Well, will she do it again?" asked several anxious voices.

"Of course we will, and you must ask too, when you pray," returned Ruth.

"We would if we knew who to ask, but we always thought the rain just happened like everything else," said the child.

Mrs. Talmage was so horrified that she could not speak a word as she hurried away. She walked home alone, thinking of what she had

just heard, and wondering if there wasn't some way in which she could help teach these little ones the lessons that had been neglected in their up-bringing.

It did not rain the next day, but the air was so damp and foggy that there was nothing to tempt one out-of-doors, so the third day was spent in completing the houses where the paper dolls expected to live. By twelve o'clock, all were finished. At noon, Ike called for the Blue Birds and drove them to their homes, and at two o'clock they were back again at the school to continue the fun.

In the afternoon the paper ladies, men, children and maids were divided into families, and every child had some dolls to cut out. This did not take very long, and soon everyone was busy keeping house, visiting, having balls, and dinner-parties. While the fun was at its height at four o'clock, the matron came in and said, "I just heard a dreadful thing. A paper policeman tells me that not one family in this paper town has a name, so he can't tell whose house belongs to one family, or to another. The paper postman came up while the policeman was talking to me, and he said, 'Yes, that is so. I never know

to whom the letters are sent, for no one here has a name.'

"The moment I heard this, I came right in to tell you that you must have a big christening and that each child must choose a name for her doll family."

When the matron first began talking the children were serious, but as she spoke, they saw she was playing, and when she concluded they laughed, and shouted for some names.

"Well, of course, you are the grandparents of these families who live in the doll-houses, and you must choose their names; but the ladies and myself will give the christening party to all present."

As she spoke, the maids were seen coming down the hall, with large trays full of little cakes and tall pitchers of lemonade. The children jumped about and clapped their hands, shouting, "Our matron is the nicest lady we ever knew, 'cept Mrs. Talmage, and Mrs. Stevens, and Mrs. Catlin, and Miss Blue Birds."

The lemonade and cakes were placed upon the table, and as each child was called out to choose a name for her doll family, she was given a glass of lemonade and two cakes. After every

family had been given a name, a song was sung, and the christening party was over.

Just then the sun broke through the clouds and the day faded with the rosy setting of the sun.

"Three days of rain, and not one child grumbled," said the matron.

"And everyone knows more about colors, furniture, and decoration than one can believe, for children will take in more instruction through play than in any other way, and they never forget it, either," said Mrs. Catlin.

"Yes," sighed Mrs. Talmage, looking wistfully at the little faces. "They know more of material things and work, but what about their soul's welfare?"

"We'll get them together Sunday and have a grand big meeting, where each of us can take a few children and tell all about the love of God, and how they should love one another," whispered Mrs. Stevens.

"Amen! We will, and I shall rest easier after that," sighed Mrs. Talmage, as if a weight had been lifted from her heart.

CHAPTER XVI

THE BLUE BIRDS' SWIMMING POOL

"Do you know, mother, I'm so glad we had an outdoor Sunday school for those city children," said Ruth, the Sunday night after the fifty children had come to the shady lawn of Mossy Glen, to be told the Wonderful Story. Many of them had heard of the story as one that did not concern anyone nowadays, and some there were who had never known of a Father who watches over all —even the little birds and the flowers in the field. It made a deep impression upon the youthful minds, and all were better for the meeting held that afternoon.

"I am glad we planned it, too, dear, but there ought to be some way in which these children could be trained to understand God better."

Mrs. Talmage had been roused, however, and determined to see some influential people about it.

A few days after this, Ruth sat at the breakfast table thinking very earnestly over something.

"What's the matter, Fluff?" asked Ned.

"Why, I was wondering how it is these city children can swim and do things country children can't. It seems to me that we ought to know these things before they could, having lakes, and rivers, and everything right here."

"I often thought I should like you to know how to swim, but there is no teacher or place where a child could be taught," added Mrs. Talmage.

"I would love to know how, and I am sure the other Blue Birds would be glad to learn, too, if we could find a place," said Ruth.

"Last week, when I saw those city boys swimming about the gym pool like fish," said Mrs. Talmage, "I was surprised, and when they told me that some of the girls four and five years old could swim quite well, I thought Ruth ought to learn. One of the boys said to me that many things came to them that country children couldn't have. For instance, the grand opera singers give free concerts for the children so that every poor child may hear good music. Then, too, the big museums and art collections have days when children are admitted free of charge.

"To return to the subject of swimming, I will see Simon, and find out if that pond in the woods

could be cleaned out and made deeper. He could easily build a bath-house, and then, you Blue Birds could get bathing suits, and Ned could teach you how to swim."

"Mete is the best swimmer about here, and I'm sure he and Jinks will help teach the girls," added Ned, eagerly.

Simon was consulted that morning, and the result was that some men were engaged to dredge the pond of its dead leaves and growing weeds, and in a few days the place looked entirely different. Where the clear spring water used to run over a dark bottom, soft with mud and decayed leaves, it was now as clear as crystal, the bottom having been covered with white sand and pebbles. After the mud and débris had been cleaned out, the pool was much deeper, and made a delightful bathing spot. The bath-house was built with little rooms just large enough to hold one girl, and it stood under the trees by the bank of the pool. A car-load of sand had been thrown on the ground between the house and the edge of the water, so tender feet would not be hurt by twigs, or get muddy.

Jinks and Meredith were fine swimmers, so Ned suggested that they come over to teach the

Blue Birds how to swim. The boys were willing, and a morning decided upon to commence the lessons.

Dot loved to swim, and said, "I can swim so I won't have to take lessons. Some one else can have my time."

"You'll find swimming in the pool very different from swimming in salt water, Dot. You never tried anywhere else but in salt water, so you'll be surprised," said Ned.

But Dot thought he was joking, and she planned how she would jump in and show the girls how far she could go across the pond.

The morning the suits arrived from the city the Blue Birds were impatient to put them on and try the water. Ned was sent over to Oakwood on his bicycle to ask the boys to come to the pool. The girls, accompanied by Mrs. Talmage, went as far as the pond and waited. Soon they heard the loud laughing and talking of the boys as they came across the woodland toward the swimming-pool.

When Ned explained his errand, Meredith and Jinks decided to change their clothes at home, and put on their bathing suits. With a raincoat to cover them, and a pair of sneakers to shield

their feet from the rough country, they went with Ned straight through the woods toward the pond. Arrived there, they dropped their coats and sneakers under the tree where Mrs. Talmage sat, and ran down to the pool.

The girls were giggling inside the little boxes, as they dressed in the new suits. One after the other came out, looking very eager as the water seemed so quiet and inviting.

Meredith was floating upon the calm surface of the pool, while Jinks and Ned were racing about playing tag in the water.

The girls stood in a row watching the fun for a few minutes.

"We ought to give the boys some other names than Owls," said Ruth laughingly. "Owls never swim."

"That's so!" cried the other girls. "Boys, you are going to have new names—you know owls never swim."

"What's mine?" called Meredith, as he kept his head perfectly quiet on the water.

"Water-Snipe!" laughed Ruth.

"What?" shouted Meredith, with so much energy, that his head went under, and his heels came up, so that he was completely submerged.

The girls laughed to see their prize swimmer duck himself.

"Mete, you'll never dare take the name of anything but polly-wog after that exhibition," said Ned.

"What's Ned's new water name?" asked Meredith, who had gained his feet, and was standing up.

"Water Bug!" cried May, whereupon everyone laughed.

"Oh, oh, May! Water Bugs do not live in ponds," gasped Norma, when she could stop laughing.

"Why not? Where do they live?" asked innocent May.

"Did you ever hear of a bug called Croton Bug?" asked Ned.

"Or by the more homely name of cockroach?" added Jinks.

"Oh, I've heard of those nasty things called cockroaches, but they are vermin," replied May with a shudder.

"Well, they are also known by the name of 'water-bug,'" explained Ned.

"If you call Ned a water-bug, you'll have to name Jinks 'Mosquito,' for he is a pest too, you

know," teased Meredith, as May could not find words to explain.

"Oh, Mete, do stop teasing May, and go back in the water," ordered Dot.

"Let's call Ned 'Ducky,'" said Betty.

"He's a boy, so Ducky doesn't fit; but we can call him Ducker, because he said he would duck everyone of us, you know," said Ruth.

"That wouldn't be a name of any water bird," objected Dot.

"I know!" exclaimed Edith. "What do you call those little birds that hop about salt marshes."

"Marsh birds?" asked Jinks.

"I always heard them called something different," answered Edith, trying to remember.

"Oh, I guess you mean yellow-bill," suggested Dot.

"That's it—Ned's a yellow-bill."

Just then Jinks jumped into the pool, but striking his large toe against a stone, he stood up on one foot while holding the toe in his hand, and hopped about. The others laughed at the funny picture he made, and Ruth laughingly said, "We've got your name, after that dance. You're a Sand Piper!"

The others agreed that the name suited Jinks, but at this moment Mrs. Talmage called over to say, "It is growing late, and not one of you girls has touched her toes to the water."

"Come in, then," ordered the Water Snipe, as he caught Dot around the waist and carried her out into the water.

The water was cold, and when Meredith lowered her down, Dot screamed and kicked, until everyone was laughing at her.

"Is it very wet, Dot?" called Ned, as he dived under water and caught hold of Dot's toe.

"Oh, girls! a turtle has my toe—oh, oh!" yelled Dot, while the others laughed, having seen Ned's teasing.

But Dot jumped about so energetically, that she lost her balance and fell under. She floundered about, churning the water like a wheel, before she could get upon her feet again. She then tried to swim and show the Blue Birds how far she could go, but she found that swimming in fresh water was very much harder than in salt water, which was more buoyant, and her exertions soon tired her.

Mrs. Talmage watched Dot for a few minutes, then, referring to her watch, said, "Come, come,

"All Right, Mother Wings, Here We Go," Replied Ruth.

children, you must not waste time jumping about on the bank. Go in and swim."

"All right Mother Wings, here we go," replied Ruth, running into the water until she was waist-deep.

"B-booh! but it's cold!" she shivered, looking back at the other girls who were feeling the water with their toes.

"Oh, go right down, girls—you'll never learn that way," advised Jinks.

Meredith had gone to Ruth's side, and now told her what to do.

"I'll hold my hands under your chest, and you just let yourself down in the water upon your face. Bring your feet up until you think you are straight out on top. You won't sink while I have my hand under you, or even hold your belt on top, ever so lightly."

Dot stood watching Ruth's strokes as Meredith told her what to do, and, after a time, Ruth had such confidence that Meredith could leave her to Dot, and go to help the other girls. Jinks and Ned were explaining the stroke, so all the Blue Birds were soon splashing about. Heads went out of sight at a wrong stroke, then bobbed up again to choke and splutter for breath, while the

others would stand by and laugh at the expressions. The swimmers had been in the water an hour when Mrs. Talmage called "time," and they were surprised to hear how quickly the time had passed.

Every fine day thereafter, the swimming lessons continued, until the girls could swim about the pond and float on their backs, swim under water, or any other way the boys did.

So much time had been spent in learning to swim that the Blue Birds felt they had neglected the city children, but Mrs. Catlin assured them that their protégés had fared very well during the week. She had given them an outing to a County Fair some miles in the country, and they had gone in great farm wagons, with the bottoms covered up with straw upon which they sat. The children displayed as much interest in the largest pumpkin exhibited, and the cutest baby calf on record, as any country child would have shown in a city sky-scraper.

Mrs. Catlin also told the Blue Birds of the Sunday-school picnic which went from a nearby town, by train, to a large lake forty miles up in the mountains. The matron bought the tickets herself and the maids went along to help take

care of the children. When the Sunday-school heard who the children were, they gave them a fine dinner, and all the fun they could crowd into the day.

The Blue Birds were delighted to hear what good times everyone was having while they had their swimming lessons, but there were only three days left of the visitors' three weeks, and Ruth said a party ought to be given the children as a remembrance.

"We're all willing to assist you, but what would you suggest," replied Mrs. Talmage, as they sat in the Nest one morning.

"I don't know exactly, but we don't want anything fussy or that will take long to fix up," said Ruth.

"It looks like rain to-morrow, so outdoors would be out of it," ventured Norma, looking at the mackerel clouds that floated so high in the sky.

"Then let's bring umbrellas," laughed Betty.

"And sit in the woods, playing house under our umbrellas?" asked Frances, disdainfully, while the others laughed.

"I don't know but what that idea would be real cute," said Mrs. Talmage. "We could have

an Umbrella Camp and invite all the paper dolls. Each little girl can have an umbrella for her tent, and we can play at visiting, house-keeping, and camping just as they do in a real camp, you know."

"It sounds real good, doesn't it?" said one Blue Bird to the other, until all were satisfied that the plan was fine.

After much discussion, it was decided that the Blue Birds would invite the city children to an Umbrella Party for the next day, if the weather was clear.

CHAPTER XVII

UMBRELLA CAMP

"Suppose the children haven't any umbrellas?" said Dot, as they started to walk to the schoolhouse to invite the children.

"Mother, have you thought of that?" asked Ruth.

"Yes, and I decided to borrow as many large and old umbrellas as we would need," replied Mrs. Talmage.

"Why, right in my own family, I can borrow ten!" exclaimed Dot, counting all she could recollect.

"We don't want your silk ones, nor any with costly handles, as some of them may get damaged, you know," advised Mrs. Talmage.

"We have some old ones that papa wouldn't use any more," said Norma.

"Those are the kind we can have most fun with," returned Mrs. Talmage.

"Shall we bring all our cardboard doll furniture?" asked May.

"Oh, no, we will have to get our camping furniture in the woods, you know. No one thinks of taking furniture with them. We will take the dolls, the bedding and the food."

By this time the Blue Birds had reached the school and the children were invited to be at the Nest the following morning at nine o'clock, if the day was fair, and bring the paper dolls, but leave the furniture in the playhouses.

Everyone was delighted to go to an Umbrella Camp, particularly as no one had ever seen one.

That night plenty of large old umbrellas were donated for the project, and many little heads popped out of the windows to see how the mackerel clouds looked. But, for once, they failed in their usual prophecy of rain, and the morning came very bright and warm.

Promptly at nine, Mrs. Talmage came out of her house and saw a crowd of happy children jumping about near the woods. Many of the boys preferred to go with some of the village boys for a day's fishing, cooking their dinner in the woods, but the younger boys went with the girls to Umbrella Camp.

When all were gathered at the Nest, they started to walk through the woods to the favor-

ite spot—the mossy glen by the spring. As the ground was quite level about the knoll where the spring bubbled up, it made an ideal camping place.

The umbrellas were opened and the handles securely propped up with stones and sticks, then each child had her tent. After all were provided with homes, Mrs. Talmage explained what they would do for camp furniture.

"I should think that all the paper dolls would be tired out, so I should advise that they all take a nap on the moss under the umbrellas. While they sleep, we can go out and hunt for useful things."

The children immediately laid their dolls down in a row under the umbrella, and came out to gather about "the lady who knew just how to play."

"I brought a large box of toothpicks to use as legs for our camp furniture," said Mrs. Talmage, placing the box on a rock. "This spool of heavy cotton will do to tie together what things will need fixing when we come back."

The cotton was laid beside the box, but the children hadn't the slightest idea of what they were going to do.

The campers started out after Mrs. Talmage, and when she stooped to pick up an acorn, they watched carefully.

"This will be a fine coffee cup," said Mrs. Talmage, taking the acorn out of its cup, "and the kernel will do for potatoes."

The children laughed gleefully at the suggestion and started to hunt for cups and potatoes. They were not acorns in their sight, after that, but dishes and food. Soon a great many had been gathered.

"Over by the pond we will find many smooth pebbles just the shape we want," she continued. "Some will look like loaves of bread, some like cakes, and some like roast meat. I have even found pebbles that looked like a roast chicken."

With this wonderful description, it is not to be doubted but that every form of food was found among the seashore pebbles had scattered all over the beach by the bath-house.

"Now, I will show you how to make berry dishes, and then we will have to hunt berries for our dinner," said Mrs. Talmage, gathering a number of large oak leaves, and some long sharp thorns. Then, sitting down, she started to make a leaf basket.

The children watched eagerly and as soon as the model basket was finished, they started off to gather leaves and thorns—some of them using stems from leaves or flowers instead of thorns.

It took some time to make the baskets, but the fun in doing so was worth the work. When all were finished, the campers started off to find berries. Blueberries grew in profusion in these woods, and high-bush blackberries in patches. The children were deeply engaged in gathering the fruit, although all of it did not find its way into the leaf baskets. In fact, too many berries went down "red lane," and so the poor paper dolls who were starving at Umbrella Camp went hungry.

Mrs. Talmage knew when children tired of one kind of play, and wisely turned their attention to some other idea.

"Umbrella Campers!" she called, "it's time to find furniture for the camp!"

So the children came from all directions to hear the plans for furnishing.

"We will walk along slowly, and look for hard, shiny leaves that will make seats for chairs or table tops. Some of us may be fortunate enough to find pieces of wood or bark. These will make

fine couches and beds. When I was a little girl, I had a playhouse in the woods all furnished with the fungi that grow out of trees. I had the loveliest white maple chairs and sofa, and a great center table, too."

"What are fungi, Mrs. Talmage?" asked several voices.

"I will show you one if we see any. It grows out of the trunks of trees near the ground, and looks just like a little shelf. They are of all forms and sizes, and I have seen pieces as large as a dinner plate."

The walk wound in and out of the woods, all of the children hunting for fungi that would make a white maple table or sofa. During the walk, twigs and pieces of bark were found, flowers for decorations, and all kinds of hardy leaves for furniture. Some pieces of fungi were discovered at the roots of trees, but none large enough to manufacture into camping furniture.

It was noon before Mrs. Talmage led the way back to camp, and the children were glad to sit under their umbrellas and rest. All kinds of things had been brought back to furnish their tents, and no time was lost after the collections were emptied on the moss beside the tents.

Mrs. Talmage showed the children how to erect the furniture on toothpick legs; how to take four sticks and wind cotton over and across them in such a way as to make a camp mattress. This frame was then fastened to four toothpicks, one at each corner, for a bed. While bark tables and leaf chairs were being built, Simon and Ike came through the woods, carrying large hampers, and a basket of glasses.

Soon they came near enough for the children to see that a picnic was planned. The baskets were left on the flat rock by Mrs. Talmage's side, and the men went back.

When the hampers were unpacked, there was a neat package for every camper. A paper napkin was tied about each lunch, and after all were distributed, the children found that their camp dinner consisted of tiny sandwiches, tomatoes, fruit and cakes. Each had a glass, so water from the spring could be had at any time.

Of course, everyone chose to eat dinner as soon as the dainty packages were opened, so no more furniture-making was done until the important work of eating was over. Great fun they had, using acorn dishes, stone bread trays, and other rare dishes found in the woods.

After dinner was over, camp-life began in earnest. Visiting, house-cleaning, and parties, followed one after the other so closely that it was a wonder when anyone took time to sleep.

Paper ladies were taken for long walks in the woods, their elegant ball dresses very much out of place among the briars and tall grasses, where their owners carried them. The paper hearts did not ache, however, even when one of the ladies had her lower limbs torn off when they caught on a bramble-bush. She had the same smile that she had when she was printed in the fashion-book.

After every form of entertainment had been thought of, and the campers had enjoyed them, Dot suddenly thought of giving a doll excursion.

"We'll take the big pieces of bark from our tents, and fasten the dolls on with cotton. Then we'll sail them from the spring, down the brook, to the pond. Mrs. Talmage will watch at the waterfall so they won't go over into the pond."

Dot's suggestion was hailed with wild approval, and Mrs. Talmage's objection was quickly overruled.

"How can I stop a lot of boats coming down the falls?" asked she.

"Just take this long pole and when the boat sails down to the rocks that are piled up at the top of the falls, poke it out to shore. We will be there to take it and go to the spring to start again," explained Dot.

Mrs. Talmage laughed aloud at Dot's vivid imagination, but said, "I see where I will be kept busy all the time. But where shall I stand so that all may be saved?"

"There's that big rock in the middle of the brook," said Dot, after an investigation; "you can stand on that and watch both sides."

"Suppose some of you fall into the brook, or get your clothes wet and muddy?" asked Mrs. Talmage as a last hope.

"Oh, no we won't, and, anyway, the brook isn't deep, or muddy either. It's all pebbles and shallow water," was Dot's reply.

Mrs. Talmage was placed on guard on the rock just above the tinkling falls, and the children started their boats.

As the bark canoes were launched, the paper lives of the ladies and children were often in great danger. Some of the boats were overloaded with the whole family, but the cotton was wound about so well that no one could fall out.

As the boats came rapidly down the little stream, the children raced up and down, after their own particular boat. Such shouting and excitement had never been heard by the tall old trees in the woods, and if the children had but watched, they might have seen the tops of the trees bend over to enjoy fun.

Sometimes a boat would hurry down the stream, and its owner would race along the side on the bank, when suddenly, the boat would get caught in some grass, or bump into another boat and both drift into the side. Then the owner would have to come back and push at the boats with a stick until they started. Again the race would begin to get down to the falls before the boats.

Mrs. Talmage was kept very busy, prodding one boat after another to keep them from going between the rocks, over the falls.

The children had never had such an exciting play in the woods, and everyone was showing the result of running up and down, by flushed faces, moist foreheads, and shining eyes.

"Mrs. Talmage! look out!" shouted Dot, suddenly. "There go four boats all runnin' side by side!"

Mrs. Talmage heard, and saw the fleet that raced toward her. She tried to pole them, so that one would blockade the others, and was succeeding nicely, when a cry of terror went up from the group of children who stood upon the slippery bank watching the way their boats were being saved from the falls. So many boats had been pulled out of the water that the grass all along the banks was wet. Many little feet had trodden it down, until it was too slippery to stand on. As everyone leaned over watching, Betty slipped and in trying to save herself, clutched hold of Norma. Both fell into the brook, and caused the others to scream. The brook was shallow and both could easily scramble out again, but the moment Mrs. Talmage looked up to see what caused the disturbance, the long boat she had held in place slid out from under the pole, and all four boats filled with paper lives rushed headlong on to their destruction. Even Betty's and Norma's fall into the brook was nothing to this awful danger. The children rushed down to the pond and jumped up and down crying out, "Get them! Catch them!" while Betty and Norma forgot their wet clothes and ran after the others.

Mrs. Talmage used the pole with such cleverness, that again she pushed the long boat across the stream and the other boats got caught upon some rocks. The long boat swayed back and forth on the point of the rock, and Mrs. Talmage's pole held it on the other side.

The children began breathing easier, and Ruth hastily pulled off her shoes and stockings and carefully stepped from rock to rock until she reached the edge of the falls just where the long boat was caught. The girls watched the rescue with bated breath, as the hand reached out to grab hold of the bark that swung on the verge of the falls.

Ruth had all but closed her fingers upon it, when one of the other boats must have broken away from the hold of the rock, and its impetus in running against the long boat made both topple over into the falls.

The cry that rang out might have led strangers to think some dreadful accident had occurred. As it was, several of the children watched the poor passengers sink in the pool without a cry, while others laughed at the unusual fun, but all ran down to the edge of the pond to watch for the dolls to rise again.

No, not all the children went down to watch, for one little girl hurried away toward the bathing houses, without being seen by the others!

Soon the boats came up to the surface, and then, one after another, children, maids, ladies, and men, floated about on the face of the water.

Ruth stood in her bare feet trying to save them, but the dolls were too far out for her to reach them. Betty and Norma suggested that as they were already so wet from the brook, an extra wetting in the pool would make no difference, but all this talk was hushed when a wild shout was heard just back of the group, and a little figure in a bathing suit, rushed by and with a jump, went splash! into the pond.

Dot had seen that a brave rescue was necessary, and so hurried into her bathing suit and went into the water to swim out and save the passengers, and the boats as well.

When all were safe on dry land, and the dolls had been smoothed out to dry, Mrs. Talmage came over toward Dot, and said, very seriously, "We must show our appreciation of the courage this brave life-saver showed, and so I present this medal."

Mrs. Talmage here showed the children a

medal which she had hastily made from a round violet leaf, from the middle of which hung two button-balls which had been pinned fast with a thorn. Dot bowed with great ceremony, and the children all laughed delightedly.

While Dot went back to the bath house to change her wet suit for her summer frock, Mrs. Talmage told the children they would have to break camp and start for home.

"Oh, Mrs. Talmage it can't be four o'clock yet?" cried some of the children.

"It is past five, and I promised the matron to have you home by five-thirty. Besides, Betty and Norma must get dry clothes on," returned Mrs. Talmage, closing her umbrella that had stood upon the rock.

Furniture and dishes were abandoned, and umbrellas were filled with paper dolls, as the children made ready to leave the woods.

"Mrs. Talmage," spoke up one little girl as they reached the Nest where good-byes were said, "we have had the most beautifulest time I ever saw!"

The others laughed, but quite agreed with the polite little girl.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE BLUE BIRDS BECOME FLIERS

The day came when the city children had to return, all insisting upon carrying their playhouse and doll furniture home to show other children how to make them.

After the band had escorted the procession to the train that carried away the last of the visitors, the Blue Birds sat in their Nest and felt that a great incentive had been taken from their midst.

"Seems as if we had our best time the last six weeks," said Norma, "but we didn't really pay much attention to the Blue Bird order."

"And after we had planned to do so much this summer, too," murmured Dot.

"We wanted to be Fliers before school began, but I suppose we've lost too much time to win that honor," added May.

Mrs. Talmage smiled at the remarks, and looked at the serious little faces for some moments.

"I think I shall have to review the six weeks that you think you lost from Blue Bird work," she said finally.

"If we start with the day the Nest was built and follow step by step, you will be surprised to see where you stand to-day. For instance, when Ned became an Owl to edit the *Chirp* we were all happy little birds wanting to have some good times. We were willing to do something good, but had no plans of anything. In less than two months since that morning, you have not only learned to sew, sing, bake, clean house, act, behave properly, play nicely, and help in every way, but you have learned the true meaning of the Golden Rule."

"Why, Mrs. Talmage, *when* did we learn all those things?" questioned Betty, dumfounded.

The other girls looked as amazed as Betty.

"'When saw we thee in want and ministered unto thee?'" quoted Mrs. Talmage. "And He said, 'As ye have done it unto one of the least of these, ye have done it unto me.' So, dearies, by helping and doing for others, you have done for yourselves what years of conscious self-improvement would not have done. The happy unselfishness of work makes for success."

The Blue Birds sat thinking very seriously of what had just been said, and Mrs. Talmage added very earnestly, "Had this Nest never been started in Oakdale, over one hundred little city children would never have had such a lovely vacation. In addition, the way the Blue Birds awakened the townspeople to a work of philanthropy without anyone being made to feel the expense of it, is most gratifying; and once being interested in such work, the people will never fall asleep over it again."

"Then, you think, we have learned to do things by showing and helping others?" said Ruth.

"Yes, and that is the best way to learn," replied Mrs. Talmage.

"Well, Mumzie said the other day, that she saw a wonderful improvement in me, and the way I take care of my room. I hardly ever forget my hat on the porch, and I like to help Babs pick her playthings up, too," said Dot, thoughtfully.

"My father said he was gladder for the Nest of Blue Birds that you started, than for anything else in ten years," exclaimed Norma.

"I think we will all be 'gladder' that Blue Birds can do so much in their lives to make others

happy, instead of sitting about moping or feeling disagreeable because they can't find anything to play or do," responded Mrs. Talmage.

"All the same, there isn't much left to do now," grumbled May, disconsolately.

"Goodness, me! What is this I hear croaking? Surely it isn't one of the Happy Times Blue Birds! They all carol and sing, but never a noise like this!" exclaimed Mrs. Talmage.

May smiled in a way that protested against feeling happy or gay.

"We did everything the book told us to," she said, "and now school will soon begin, and mother's got a dressmaker coming to make my school clothes, so I'll have to stay home and be fitted, and everything, all next week."

"Oh, isn't that fine! You'll have the first opportunity of all the Fledglings, to try the new wings," cried Mrs. Talmage, patting May on the head.

"Try my wings! Why, what do you mean?"

"I was going to call a meeting for this afternoon to promote the Blue Birds into the Flier class. When one is a Flier, one has to use one's wings all the time, or they may get stiff, you know."

That Night Ruth Helped Her Mother Pack the Suitcase.

"But I don't see where the old dressmaker comes in with my flying?" still grumbled May.

"Oh, don't you? Let me tell you, then. You will have plenty of time to show the dressmaker —by the way, are you sure she is so old as you said?" Mrs. Talmage stopped to ask.

May flushed as she laughed uncomfortably and said, "She's about twenty, I guess, but I don't want her to come now and keep me from all the good times you will have while I am at home."

"That need not be," answered Mrs. Talmage. "We can so plan our Nest meetings that you can be present, and the dressmaker can plan to fit your dresses when you are home. But, May, one thing every Blue Birds must learn thoroughly—to be truly happy and considerate for others in every trial, and not only when all the Blue Birds are together. You will be the first Bird in the Nest to try your wings away from us, and you must not fall down to earth, or refuse to fly. When we are Fliers, we will have wings. Now, wings are for flying, of course, and a Blue Bird who has wings, does not sit in the Nest and chirp and play all day long, and let Mother Wings feed her, and cover her at night with her feathers. No, indeed! When a true Blue Bird

finds she has wings, she climbs upon the edge of the nest and looks about. She tries to fly a short distance, and ofttimes finds something to eat near at home. Every time she uses her wings they grow stronger and she can fly further. Now, you are the first Blue Bird to find out that you have wings. You have to try our Nest teachings outside of the Blue Bird circle. When your wings have been tried with the dressmaker at home, and everyone is made happy and pleased at your help, you hurry back to your Nest and tell all the others what you did and how you helped. Your wings will be stronger, then, and you will have to fly a bit further on the next trial. But they will hold you up, never fear, for they are made so that every trial, as it gets harder, makes you stronger, until you can fly up, up, and up! You must never look down and say, 'Oh, dear! how far I have come up—just suppose I should fall!' That never helps anyone, but makes you feel as if you ought to rest or turn back. But keep on, as high as you can fly, and never worry about falling, or turning back!"

Although Mrs. Talmage spoke in Blue Bird words, she was very earnest, and the children understood what she meant. After a few mo-

ments of thinking, May looked up and smiled happily.

"I wish it was my turn to fly," said Betty. "I'd like to try it just the way you said we should."

"Your time will come—perhaps it is here now. Every day you will have to watch and not let your turn slip past you without knowing it is a time to try your wings. When Fledglings are to be turned into Fliers, the opportunities come, too, and most likely all of you are being prepared for a short trip out of the Nest. There is always one who has to go first, then the others generally hop about on the edge of the Nest and watch, before they follow. I never heard of every baby bird flying out of their nest at the same moment."

"Oh, how cute it sounds to hear you make fun of our work like this," cried Norma.

May's feelings had undergone a great change since her duty was made plain to her as a chance to fly and try her wings, and she felt quite elated at being the very first Blue Bird to leave the Nest.

As the children started home for luncheon, Mrs. Talmage said, "If you want your wings to-

day, you may call at the Nest at four o'clock, and I will have them ready."

That noon Mrs. Talmage received a letter with a South American post mark, and she knew it was from her husband. The children had not yet come in, but she could not wait for them, so tore open the envelope and read the letter. It had been delayed at some foreign port, and as she read, she realized that the date he said he would land in New York would be the coming Saturday afternoon.

Mr. Talmage was away so much that his homecomings were always a great joy to his family, and the news coming so unexpectedly, caused Mrs. Talmage to forget her lunch, and go out by herself where she could whisper her gratitude to God.

Ned and Ruth had gone with Ike to the Mason farm to see when the Ferris children expected to leave, and reached home later than usual for luncheon. Thinking their mother had finished and gone somewhere, they hurriedly ate their lunch and went to Ned's den. So it was that they knew nothing of the great news that had come in the letter at noon.

Mrs. Talmage was found after some time, at

work on the Blue Birds' wings, but her happy smile caused the children to ask, "What new plan have you for our pleasure?"

"It is a secret!" she said, shaking her head.

Just before four o'clock, as they were getting the wings together to carry to the Nest, a boy brought a telegram. Mrs. Talmage tore it open quickly. First a look of resentment crossed her face, then one of regret, and last a look of courage that remained a long time after the children met in the Nest.

"Well, dearies, we have the wings cut and made, but each Blue Bird will have to put her own feathers on at home, as I have some extra work to attend to this week."

The ceremony of turning Fledglings to Fliers was then enacted, and it made a deep impression on account of the talk of the morning. Each little Blue Bird was presented with a pair of wings, with the admonition always to try them when the opportunity came.

"I tried to remember all you said this morning," said May after the wings had been given out, "and I told mother I was glad to try my wings on the dressmaker."

Mrs. Talmage smiled approvingly, and then

took the telegram from her pocket and held it folded in her hand.

"Since we met this morning," she said, "I heard of another Blue Bird who is called upon to fly."

The children edged nearer to hear the news.

"I happen to have heard of a trial flight that will tax the muscles of the little Flier. But she would not have to try it if she was not strong enough to do it, you know. The watchful Father knows each one's strength and only gives us to do what we surely can perform."

The unusual seriousness of Mrs. Talmage's manner made the children all the more curious. "Oh, Mrs. Talmage, do tell me it is for me!" cried Dot.

Mrs. Talmage shook her head, and held up the telegram.

"No, it is all told in this message which came to me an hour ago," she replied.

"Mother! Is the flying for me?" eagerly asked Ruth.

"Yes, and I was wondering if you would feel that the opportunity to try your wings the way that has been shown, was unusual, and whether some great good would come out of it."

Ruth felt her mother's uncertainty of how the news would be received, and said nothing until she should hear what the trial flight would be, but Dot cried out in her usual impulsiveness, "Tell us quick, what it is! Maybe I can do it, instead of Fluff."

"No, every Blue Bird must make her own flight, and no one can do it for you. Now, Fluff has an invitation to fly all the way to Aunt Selina's and stay with her for a week, or more. Aunt Selina has another attack of rheumatism and wants a kind little grand-niece around her chair."

Most of the children knew of Aunt Selina, and what a disagreeable old lady she was, and how strict she was with everything in her house and affairs. They all felt sorry for Ruth, but Ruth felt most sorry for herself, as she said,

"Oh, mother! It *is* quite a cloud to fly through, but I can do it I suppose. Maybe I won't have to be gone very long, and then it won't be so hard. How long *must* I stay?"

"You *mustn't* feel that you have to stay—it is for you to do some good flying there. And the cloud you speak of! That is as you let it *seem* cloudy. If you look on the bright side of the

cloud you will find the sun is shining there, and the sun never knew there was a cloud."

The Blue Birds smiled at Ruth's smile, and Dot said, "When does she have to go?"

"Aunt Selina wants her to start Saturday morning."

"And the telegram says 'a short visit,'" read Ruth, as she took the paper from her mother.

"The length of the visit is not the trial of wings, it is the *feelings* you start off with. If we *want* to help some one else, we always can do it, for the desire opens a way. You wanted to try your wings for some one, and the desire opened the way. Do not stop to think of the good times we may be having at Oakdale, or even at Mossy Glen, but look for some work you can do at Aunt Selina's, and when all you can do at this time is done, you will fly straight home again."

"All right, Mother Wings, I won't sit on the edge of the Nest and worry about falling over—I will fly straight to the place where I am to stretch my muscles," laughed Ruth.

"That's the way to chirp," commented Mrs. Talmage. "Now, preen your fluffy feathers that are keeping your heart warm, for you must have

them shine and look bright this very minute, when I tell you something else that your trial flight will make you leave at home."

Ruth caught the note of pained disappointment in her mother's tone and looked quickly into her face.

"Mother!" she said, as she read something unusual expressed in that beloved face.

The other Blue Birds stood about in silence, for here was a trial flight for one of their Nest, that no one was quite able to understand.

Mrs. Talmage sat still for a few moments, and then took a letter from her dress.

"I received this letter at noon," she continued, "and it had the most joyful news that you can wish for. I was going to tell you later, but Aunt Selina's telegram came and I saw the long, long flight that awaited you, little Fluff."

Ruth recognized the beloved writing on the envelope, and her face looked white, as she said, "I don't have to go!"

Not a word was said in the Nest, even Dot feeling the dreadful trial too great for mere empty speech.

Ruth went over to the edge of the Nest and looked far into the woods, then after a long

period of silent waiting, the Blue Birds saw her turn and face them with a smile.

"Girls, father is coming Saturday, and I haven't seen him since Christmas; but Aunt Selina may send me home in a few days, or she may be well by Saturday, and if I refused to go, I'd lose the great 'fly' that is waiting for me."

"Oh!" gasped the Blue Birds, in sympathy, when they heard of the long, high flight given Ruth.

"Why don't father come sooner, or why don't Aunt Selina have her rheumatism afterwards?" asked Ruth, impatiently.

"Aren't the wings strong enough yet?" asked Mrs. Talmage very earnestly.

"Oh, yes, they're all right, but of course, I can feel a lot of soreness under my feathers, where the wings are being stretched out to make me ready," replied Ruth, smiling through her tears.

"I should think your Aunt Selina would have some of her other nieces visit her," said Dot, feeling sorry for Ruth.

"They won't stay, and she says I always do her so much good," replied Ruth.

"After all, my Blue Birds, everything we do

is a trial to fly higher. If we never did anything that made our wings grow, how would we ever accomplish anything?"

The next day was Thursday, and the Blue Birds met in their Nest to talk over events since the meeting of the day before?

"I am to try my wings on the dressmaker tomorrow," laughed May, as if she looked forward to it as a great treat.

"And Jamie and Alice Ferris are going to try their wings going back to the unpleasant city streets," added Mrs. Talmage, hoping to show the children that there were many who had hard trials to meet.

"And I'm going to fly to Aunt Selina's Saturday morning," said Ruth, quite cheerful over the unpleasant visit.

"And I found a way to stretch my feathers, too," admitted Dot. "Don borrowed Jinks' watch last week when Jinks left his coat on our side porch. Just as Don was going to see what time it was, the thing fell and broke its sides in. Daddum said Don is too big to meddle with folks' things, so he is asking Don to work in the garden every day and earn enough money to pay for the spring and glass in Jinks' watch. Of

course, being a twin, I have to help Don weed."

Mrs. Talmage knew something of the troubles of Don and Dot.

"Where were you, Dot, when Don borrowed the watch?" she asked.

"Oh, I was there. We were going to the workshop and didn't want to be late for supper, so we thought Don ought to have the watch to tell us when it was six o'clock, you see," admitted Dot.

"Then that was the time for you to fly!" exclaimed Mrs. Talmage, to Dot's amazement. "Helping Don weed the garden to earn money to pay for the broken watch, is a flutter, but the grand opportunity to be the very first bird out of this Nest was lost last week, when you did not resist the temptation to borrow Jinks' watch. Had you done so, it would have made me, all of your family, and this Nest clap our hands to see you feel your wings and use them without being shown how."

As the meaning of the wings began to be understood by the children, they felt a greater responsibility in being a Blue Bird.

"I'll fly all right the next time!" Dot exclaimed.

"But, really and truly, Mrs. Talmage, Fluff will have the strongest wings after her fly, won't she?" asked Norma.

"No one can say, for the size of the task is not what gives quality to the wings, but the way in which we do our flying."

"Well, Fliers, if I go way off on my trial, and May pulls bastings at home, while Dot's helping weed the garden, there will be four of you to write to us and tell all that the Nest is doing. It will be fun to write to each other and tell our plans," said Ruth, hopefully.

"Say, Fluff, your visit ought to give you lots of time to think out some plans for our Nest this Fall," said Betty.

"That's so, and I will put down everything that I think of, and you can do the same, so we can compare them when I get home," said Ruth, eagerly.

So the Nest was more like the place it should be—a home of happy Blue Birds.

The next morning the Ferris children were escorted to the train by the Blue Birds, and Jamie told them how glad he was that he learned to know about the Blue Birds, for he was going to help Alice be a true one all her life.

Mrs. Mason had sent a barrel of apples, vegetables, and other things to the city to Jamie's mother, and the two children said good-bye, with happy contentment.

That night Ruth helped her mother pack the suitcase which was to be taken to Aunt Selina's.

"Mother Wings," she said, "I suppose I ought to feel happy, and sing, to think I don't have rheumatism like poor Aunt Selina; and if I can help her fly over that awful pain, I should be glad to help her."

Mrs. Talmage smiled up at her little Blue Bird, and nodded her head, then she stooped again to tuck a ribbon in the side of the suitcase.

The next morning, seven Blue Birds stood on the veranda steps telling one of their Nest what she should do on the long flight away from home. And the little bird about to fly smiled bravely through her tears, as she said,

"And you all tell father how willingly I flew to Aunt Selina to show her how to fly."

How Aunt Selina Flew will be told in
"The Blue Birds' Winter Nest."